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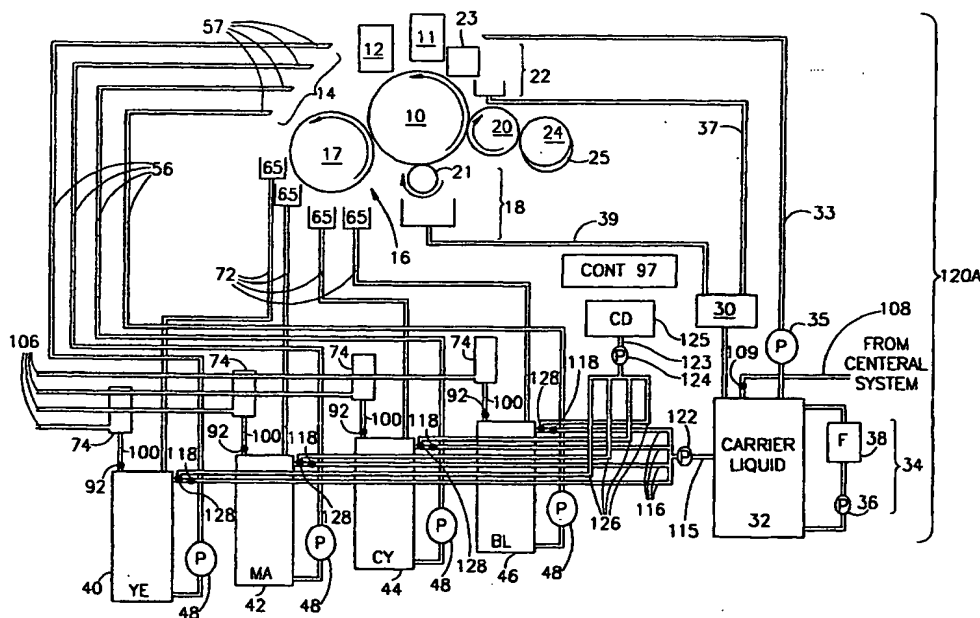
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(54) Title: **CENTRAL-INK SUPPLY SYSTEM FOR MULTI-PRINTER SYSTEMS**



(57) Abstract: A multi-printer system comprising: a plurality of imaging apparatus, each said apparatus comprising at least one liquid-toner reservoir, containing liquid toner; a central source of toner concentrate; a toner concentrate conduit which connects the central source to the individual imaging apparatus; and at least one toner-concentrate pump which pumps the toner concentrate from the central source to the individual imaging apparatus.

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CENTRAL-INK SUPPLY SYSTEM FOR MULTI-PRINTER SYSTEMS**FIELD OF THE INVENTION**

The present invention relates generally to multi-printer facilities of at least two imaging apparatus (such as printing or copying machines) and in particular, to liquid-toner replenishment systems for multi-printer facilities.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Liquid toner for imaging apparatus (such as printing or copying machines) generally contains carrier liquid, toner particles and a minute amount of charge director. Generally, each color of liquid toner is stored in a reservoir from which it is fed to a printing engine for developing images. For good quality printing, proper balance of the three liquid-toner components should be maintained within a narrow band. Depletion of the liquid-toner components is dependent on factors such as the number of prints, the percent of ink coverage of each image and other factors. However, these affect each component differently and each component of the liquid toner depletes at a different rate.

In some prior art systems, replenishment is carried out separately with respect to each component of the liquid toner.

Toner particles are generally replenished in the form of toner concentrate, having a relatively high percentage of particles in liquid carrier. In general, a measurement of the optical density of the liquid toner in the reservoir reveals that the concentration of toner particles has fallen below a predetermined level and that replenishment of toner particles is required.

Carrier liquid is added whenever the liquid toner level in the reservoir falls below a certain level.

Charge director may be added to the toner concentrate. Alternatively or additionally, it may be added to the carrier liquid. Alternatively or additionally, it may be supplied in a separate charge director solution. Charge director is added when the conductivity of the liquid toner is below a predetermined value.

In some systems toner concentrate is replenished from discrete replaceable cartridges, located within the imaging apparatus. Cartridge replacement involves machine down-time and operator attention. Both these factors are costly and inconvenient.

Automatic replenishment of toner concentrate, carrier liquid and charge directors are known.

US patent 5,231,454, "Charge Director Replenishment System and Method for a Liquid Toner Developing Apparatus," the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by

reference, describes an automatic replenishment system for all three liquid toner components, for single, multicolor, imaging apparatus.

US patent 4,860, 924, "Liquid Developer Charge Director Control," the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference, describes another system of automatic replenishment for all three components of the liquid toner, wherein again, the replenishment system is individual for single, multicolor, imaging apparatus.

US patent 5,655,194 "Dispenser Apparatus Especially for Liquid Toner Concentrate," the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference, describes apparatus for dispensing liquid-toner concentrate and a container for the liquid-toner concentrate for single, multicolor, imaging apparatus. The system is further described in US patent 5,558,900 "Liquid Developer System," and US patent 5,148,222 "Liquid Developer System," the disclosures of which are incorporated herein by reference.

Other liquid developer assemblies are described in US patent 5,557,376, the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference.

Exemplary forms of optical density measurement systems (to determine the need for replenishment of toner-concentrate) are shown in US patents 4,579,253; 4,860,924; 5,793,490; and 5,570,193 the disclosures of all of which are incorporated herein by reference.

An exemplary form of conductivity measurement system (to determine the need for replenishment of charge-director solution) is shown in US patent 4,860,924 the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to an aspect of some preferred embodiments of the present invention toner is replenished in individual imaging apparatus in a multi-printer facility from a central toner replenishment system.

In some preferred embodiments of the present invention, the central toner replenishment system comprises a central supply system for toner concentrate.

Preferably, where the multi-printer facility is single-color, the central supply system of toner concentrate comprises one tank of toner concentrate and each imaging apparatus has one liquid-toner reservoir. Preferably, where the multi-printer facility comprises multicolor imaging apparatus or a mixture of multicolor and single-color imaging apparatus, the central supply system of toner concentrate comprises as many as four and possibly more tanks of toner concentrate, one for each color, and the multicolor imaging apparatus comprises as many as four and possibly more corresponding liquid-toner reservoirs each.

In some preferred embodiments of the present invention, each liquid-toner reservoir is replenished with toner concentrate directly from the central system. Alternatively, each liquid-toner reservoir comprises a toner-concentrate dispenser can which dispenses toner concentrate to the reservoir, on demand. Preferably, the toner-concentrate dispenser can is continuously replenished from the central system.

An aspect of some preferred embodiments of the present invention is that a multi-printer facility of at least two imaging apparatus comprises a central system of carrier liquid, supplying the individual imaging apparatus.

In preferred embodiments according to this aspect, the liquid-toner reservoirs of the imaging apparatus draw the carrier-liquid directly from the central system and have no carrier-liquid reservoirs. Alternatively, each imaging apparatus has its own carrier-liquid reservoir, which is replenished from the central system, on demand, when the level in the apparatus carrier-liquid reservoir falls below a given value.

In some preferred embodiments of the invention, the central system of carrier liquid supplies carrier liquid for cleaning purposes as well. In preferred embodiments, as described below, in which the individual imaging apparatus have no separate liquid-toner reservoirs, carrier liquid from the central system is supplied only for cleaning purposes.

An aspect of some preferred embodiments of the present invention is that a multi-printer facility of at least two imaging apparatus comprises a central liquid-toner system that supplies the liquid-toner working solution to the individual imaging apparatus, as required.

In preferred embodiments of this aspect, the imaging apparatus draw the liquid-toner working solution for each color directly from the central system and have no liquid toner reservoirs themselves.

Preferably, where the multi-printer facility comprises only single-color imaging apparatus, the central system comprises a single reservoir of liquid-toner working solution. Preferably, where the multi-printer facility comprises multicolor imaging apparatus or a mixture of multicolor and single-color imaging apparatus, the central system comprises as many as four or more reservoirs of liquid-toner working solutions, one for each color.

An aspect of some preferred embodiments of the present invention is that replenishment of charge director to a liquid-toner reservoir is made indirectly, on demand, by adding charge director to a carrier-liquid line just prior to replenishment of carrier liquid to a specific reservoir. This aspect is applicable to multi-printer facilities having central systems of liquid toner and carrier liquid as well as to facilities in which carrier liquid is supplied to each local liquid-toner reservoir from a local carrier liquid reservoir.

In preferred embodiments of this aspect, the carrier-liquid flow, for example, of the order of 50 milliliters per replenishment, is used to carry the charge-director, which is minute, for example, of the order of a few milliliters, from the carrier liquid line to the liquid toner reservoir. In addition to assuring that the proper amount of charge director reaches the reservoir, this method also purges the carrier liquid line so that no excess charge director is supplied to the reservoirs later.

There is thus provided, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention, a multi-printer system comprising:

a plurality of imaging apparatus, each said apparatus comprising at least one liquid-toner reservoir, containing liquid toner;

a central source of toner concentrate;

a toner concentrate conduit which connects the central source to the individual imaging apparatus; and

at least one toner-concentrate pump which pumps the toner concentrate from the central source to the individual imaging apparatus.

In a preferred embodiment of the invention, the imaging apparatus each comprise:

a toner-concentrate dispenser which dispenses toner concentrate to said liquid-toner reservoir,

wherein the toner concentrate conduit connects the central source to the toner concentrate dispenser, such that toner concentrate is transferred from the central source to the toner concentrate dispenser via the toner concentrate conduit.

Preferably, the system comprises at least one controller.

Preferably, the toner concentrate dispenser comprises a dispenser can; and the can dispenses toner concentrate into the reservoir in response to a command from the at least one controller.

Preferably, the central source of toner concentrate comprises a central container of toner concentrate, containing a concentrate of the same color as a liquid-toner contained in a liquid-toner reservoir of the imaging apparatus; and the toner concentrate conduit is a branching feed line comprising: a junction having an input port and a plurality of output ports; a line connecting the source with the input port; and a plurality of lines, each connecting one of the output ports with a different one of the imaging apparatus.

Preferably, a toner-concentrate pump is located on each line connecting the source with an input port. Preferably, the toner-concentrate pump operates continuously. Preferably, the at least one toner-concentrate pump comprises a high-viscosity pump.

In a preferred embodiment of the invention, in the imaging apparatus are multi-colored and the system comprises a plurality of central sources of toner concentrate, each having a different color of toner concentrate. Preferably, the plurality of liquid-toner reservoirs comprises liquid-toner reservoirs of at least yellow, magenta and cyan toner.

5 In a preferred embodiment of the invention, each liquid-toner reservoir comprises a particle density measurement device that measures a quantity related to the density of toner particles in the liquid toner and sends the measurements to the at least one controller and wherein the at least one controller transfers toner concentrate to the liquid toner reservoir responsive to the measurements.

10 Preferably, each of the printing apparatus includes:

- a carrier-liquid reservoir from which carrier liquid is supplied to the liquid-toner reservoir; and

- at least one local carrier liquid conduit through which carrier liquid is supplied to the liquid-toner reservoir, responsive to commands from the at least one controller; and

15 the system includes:

- a central source of carrier liquid; and

- a central carrier liquid conduit which carries the carrier liquid to individual ones of the carrier liquid reservoirs responsive to commands from the at least one controller.

20 There is further provided, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention, a multi-printer system comprising:

- a plurality of imaging apparatus, each said apparatus comprising a liquid-toner reservoir;

- a central source of carrier liquid;

- at least one controller; and

25 a central carrier-liquid conduit which connects the central source of carrier liquid to each of the imaging apparatus and carries carrier liquid to the individual apparatus responsive to a command from the at least one controller.

30 Preferably, the imaging apparatus includes: a carrier-liquid reservoir from which carrier liquid is supplied to the liquid-toner reservoir, wherein the central carrier liquid conduit carries the carrier liquid to individual ones of the carrier liquid reservoirs responsive to commands from the at least one controller.

Preferably, the central carrier-liquid conduit comprises a branching carrier-liquid feed line, comprising: a proximal end at the central source of carrier liquid; and distal ends at the imaging apparatus.

Preferably, the branching carrier-liquid feed line comprises valves at its distal ends; and the valves are controlled by the at least one controller.

Preferably, the carrier-liquid conduit comprises a pump; and the pump is controlled by the at least one controller.

5 Preferably, each carrier-liquid reservoir comprises a carrier-liquid level indicator; and measurements of the carrier-liquid level indicator are sent to the at least one controller.

Preferably, each imaging apparatus comprises a conductivity measurement device that measures the conductivity of liquid toner in the liquid toner reservoir; and the system includes:

10 a source of charge director solution; and

at least one charge director solution conduit that communicates between the source of charge director solution and the at least one carrier liquid conduit, wherein a quantity of charge director solution is sent to the reservoir responsive to a low conductivity measurement.

15 There is further provided, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention, a printer system comprising:

at least one liquid toner reservoir, each said reservoir including a first detector that provides a first signal when the amount of liquid toner therein falls below a given volume and a second detector that measures the conductivity of the liquid toner and produces a second signal responsive thereto;

20 a source of carrier liquid;

a source of charge director solution;

at least one controller;

at least one carrier liquid conduit that communicates between the source of carrier liquid and the at least one liquid toner reservoir;

25 at least one charge director solution conduit that communicates between the source of charge director solution and the at least one carrier liquid conduit,

wherein the controller is operative to transfer a first quantity of carrier liquid to a liquid toner reservoir via the charge director conduit when the first signal associated with the reservoir indicates a low volume condition for the reservoir and is operative to send a second quantity of charge director solution to the reservoir via the charge-director and carrier-liquid conduits, responsive to the second signal associated with the reservoir indicating a low conductivity condition.

30 Preferably, in transferring the charge director to the reservoir, the controller is operative to transfer the quantity of charge director solution to the local carrier conduit which

charge director solution is then carried by a subsequent transfer of carrier liquid to the reservoir. Preferably, the controller is operative to send the charge director solution to the local carrier liquid conduit immediately prior to sending carrier liquid to the reservoir such that the carrier liquid carries the charge director into the reservoir.

5 In a preferred embodiment of the invention, the quantity of charge director solution sent to the liquid toner reservoir is substantially less than the quantity of carrier liquid sent to the reservoir.

Preferably, the charge director conduit joins the carrier liquid conduit near an entrance to the reservoir from the carrier liquid conduit.

10 There is further provided, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention, a multi-printer system comprising:

a plurality of imaging apparatus, each said apparatus comprising:

a printing engine

15 a liquid-toner inlet line from which fresh liquid toner is fed to the printing engine;

a central source of liquid toner;

a liquid-toner feed which connects the central source to the liquid-toner inlet line;

at least one controller which transfers fresh liquid toner from the central source, via said feed.

20 Preferably, each imaging apparatus includes:

a liquid-toner exhaust line which collects discharged liquid toner from the printing engine and delivers it to the central source.

Preferably, the liquid-toner feed is a branching feed line comprising:

a junction;

25 a first feed line connecting the central source with the junction; and

a plurality of second feed lines connecting the junction with respective liquid-toner inlet lines of the imaging apparatus.

Preferably each of said plurality of feed lines includes a valve controlled by the at least one controller.

30 Preferably, the imaging apparatus are multi-colored; and a liquid-toner inlet line comprises a plurality of liquid-toner inlet lines.

Preferably, the central source of liquid toner is multi-colored, comprising a plurality of central containers of liquid toner of different colors. Preferably, the plurality of liquid-toner containers comprises liquid-toner containers of at least yellow, magenta and cyan toner.

In a preferred embodiment of the invention, the system includes:

a central source of carrier liquid; and

a carrier liquid conduit that connects the central source to the individual imaging apparatus, wherein the at least one controller is operative to transfer carrier liquid from the central source of carrier liquid to the individual imaging apparatus as required by the apparatus for cleaning.

Preferably, the system includes a carrier-liquid pump that pumps carrier-liquid to respective imaging apparatus responsive to commands from said at least one controller.

Preferably, the system includes a carrier liquid return conduit that collects carrier liquid after use by the imaging device and transfers it to the central source of carrier liquid.

Preferably, the system includes a separator that removes toner particles from the collected carrier liquid prior to its delivery to the central source of carrier liquid.

There is further provided, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention, a multi-printer system comprising:

a plurality of imaging apparatus,

a central source of carrier liquid;

at least one controller;

a central carrier-liquid conduit which connects the central source of carrier liquid to each of the imaging apparatus and carries carrier liquid to the individual apparatus responsive to a command from the at least one controller.

Preferably, the system includes a carrier-liquid exhaust line which collects discharged carrier liquid from the imaging apparatus and returns it to the central source of carrier liquid.

Preferably, the imaging apparatus comprise electrostatographic imaging apparatus.

Preferably, the imaging apparatus comprise electrophotographic apparatus.

In a preferred embodiment of the invention, the imaging apparatus comprise printers. In a preferred embodiment of the invention, the imaging apparatus comprise copiers.

There is further provided, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention, a method of dispensing toner concentrate in a multi-printer facility comprising a plurality of imaging apparatus, each said apparatus comprising a liquid toner reservoir, the method comprising:

providing a central source of toner concentrate; and

automatically transferring toner concentrate from said central source to individual imaging apparatus.

In a preferred embodiment of the invention, transferring comprises transferring toner

concentrate directly to a liquid-toner reservoir of the individual imaging apparatus, in response to a deficiency of toner concentrate in the reservoir.

In a preferred embodiment of the invention, transferring comprises transferring toner concentrate to a liquid-toner concentrate dispenser associated with a liquid-toner reservoir in the individual imaging apparatus.

There is further provided, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention, a method of providing liquid toner in a multi-printer facility comprising a plurality of imaging apparatus, comprising:

providing a central source of liquid toner; and

automatically transferring liquid toner from said central source to individual imaging apparatus in response to a need of liquid toner in said imaging apparatus.

There is further provided, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention, a method of providing carrier liquid in a multi-printer facility comprising a plurality of imaging apparatus, comprising: providing a central source of carrier liquid; and automatically transferring carrier liquid from said central source to individual imaging apparatus in response to a need of carrier liquid in said imaging apparatus.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The present invention will be more clearly understood from the following detailed description of the preferred embodiments of the invention and from the attached drawings, in which same number designations are maintained throughout the figures for the same element and in which:

Fig. 1A is a schematic block diagram of a multi-printer facility, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 1B is a schematic block diagram of multicolor, electrostatic, imaging apparatus, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 1C is a schematic block diagram of a central replenishment system in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

Figs. 2A and 2B are side sectional illustrations of a liquid-toner concentrate dispenser can in two operative positions, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 3 is a schematic illustration of a liquid-toner reservoir, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention;

Fig. 4A is a schematic block diagram of another multi-printer facility, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 4B is a schematic block diagram of another multicolor, electrostatic, imaging apparatus, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 4C is a schematic block diagram of another central supply system in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

5 Fig. 5A is a schematic block diagram of still another multi-printer facility, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 5B is a schematic block diagram of still another multicolor, electrostatic, imaging apparatus, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention; and

10 Fig. 5C, is a schematic block diagram of still another central system in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Reference is now made to Figs. 1A, 1B and 1C, which are schematic block diagrams of a multi-printer facility 100, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention. Fig. 1A illustrates multi-printer facility 100, which comprises a central system 110
15 in communication with 3 multicolor, electrostatic, imaging apparatus 120A, 120B and 120C via feed lines 112. Fig. 1B illustrates single imaging apparatus 120A. Fig. 1C illustrates central system 110.

Fig. 1B is a schematic block diagram of multicolor, electrostatic, imaging apparatus 120A in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention. Preferably,
20 imaging apparatus 120A comprises an image bearing surface, typically embodied in a rotating photoconductive drum 10. Associated with photoconductive drum 10 is photoconductor charging apparatus 11. Also associated with photoconductive drum 10 is imaging apparatus 12, for example, a laser scanner, for providing a desired latent image on drum 10. The latent image normally includes image areas at a first electrical potential and background areas at
25 another electrical potential.

Photoconductive drum 10, photoconductor charging apparatus 11 and imaging apparatus 12 may be any suitable drum, charging apparatus and imaging apparatus as are well known in the art. Preferred photoreceptors, are, for example, those described in US Patent 5,376,491 or in PCT published application WO 96/07955. For example, charging apparatus as
30 described in published PCT application WO 94/22059 or unpublished PCT application PCT/IL98/00553 may be used.

Preferably, associated with photoconductive drum 10 are an intermediate transfer member 20, a cleaning station 22 and an excess liquid removal assembly 18.

Intermediate transfer member 20, cleaning station 22 and excess liquid removal assembly 18, may be any suitable intermediate transfer member, cleaning station and excess liquid removal assembly as are well known in the art.

Intermediate transfer member 20 may be for example, one of the intermediate transfer members described in one of US Patents 5,089,856; 5,572,274; 5,410,392; 5,592,269; 5,745,829; PCT published PCT applications WO 97/07433; WO 98/55901; WO 96/13760; and unpublished PCT applications PCT/IL/98/00576; and PCT/IL98/00553. Preferred cleaning station, useful in the practice of the present invention are described in US patent 4,439,035 and unpublished PCT application PCT/IL98/00553, the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference. Pre-transfer excess liquid removal and discharge mechanisms useful in the present invention are described, for example, in US Patents 4,286,039; 5,276,492; 5,572,274; 5,166,734; 5,854,960.

In preferred embodiments of the invention a pre-transfer erase mechanism may be present, such as that described in US patent 5,166,734.

Preferably, intermediate transfer member 20 is arranged for electrostatic transfer of the image from the image-bearing surface. Intermediate transfer member 20 is preferably associated with a impression roller 24 for transfer of the image onto a further substrate 25, such as paper, preferably mounted on roller 24, preferably by heat and pressure.

Preferably, after developing each image in a given color, the developed single-color image is transferred to intermediate transfer member 20. Subsequent images in different colors are sequentially transferred onto intermediate transfer member 20. When all the desired images have been transferred thereto, the complete multicolor image is transferred from transfer member 20 to substrate 25. Therefore, impression roller 24 produces operative engagement between intermediate transfer member 20 and substrate 25 only when transfer of the composite image to substrate 25 takes place.

Alternatively, each single color image is transferred to the paper after its formation. In this case, the single color images are transferred seriatim to the paper. Alternatively, intermediate transfer member 20 is omitted and the developed single color images are transferred sequentially directly from drum 10 to substrate 25.

Preferably, cleaning station 22 receives supply of clear carrier liquid from a carrier liquid reservoir 32 via a supply conduit 33 and a carrier liquid pump 35. Preferably, the carrier liquid used by cleaning station 22 and drum 10 and is collected and returned to reservoir 32 through a conduit 37.

Preferably, the carrier liquid collected by excess liquid removal assembly 18 is returned to reservoir 32 through conduit 39.

In some preferred embodiments, a separator 30 is used to separate any toner particles from the used carrier liquid of conduits 37 and 39. Clean carrier liquid is supplied from separator 30 to carrier-liquid reservoir 32. Separator 30 may be any separator as known in the art. In some preferred embodiments, separator 30 is of the type described in US patent 4,985,732, the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference.

Alternatively or additionally, carrier liquid from reservoir 32 circulates continuously through a filtering system 34 comprising a pump 36 and a filter 38.

Alternatively or additionally, a filter (for example a 10 micron filter) is used after pump 35 to remove solid material in the carrier liquid. Preferably, a pressure drop across the filter is measured and the magnitude of the pressure is used as an indication of whether the filter should be replaced.

Also associated with photoconductive drum 10 is a multicolor liquid developer assembly 16 which includes a developer roller electrode 17, spaced from photoconductive drum 10 and preferably rotating in the same sense as drum 10. This rotation provides for the surfaces of drum 10 and roller 17 to have opposite velocities in their region of propinquity. Developer assembly 16 also includes multicolor, liquid-toner supply assembly 14, for providing colored toner to develop latent images on photoconductive drum 10.

In some preferred embodiments of the invention, multicolor, liquid-toner supply assembly 14 is a single-engine assembly which receives separate supplies of colored liquid toner from four different reservoirs 40, 42, 44 and 46, typically containing yellow, magenta, cyan and black liquid toners respectively. Four pumps 48 are provided at the entrances of the four supply conduits 56 for providing a desired amount of pressure to feed the colored liquid toner to a series of four spray nozzles 57. The colored liquid toners are collected into a series of four collection trays 65 and returned to the proper reservoirs through a series of four collection conduits 72. Preferred developer systems of the type described above, useful in the present invention are described, for example in US patents 5,028,964; 5,231,454; 5,289,238; 5,148,222; 5,255,058; 5,117,263 or published PCT application WO 96/29633, the disclosures of all of which are incorporated by reference. Preferably, toner of the general type described in US Patent 4,794,651 is desirable for use in the present invention. Moreover, US patents 4,980,259; 5,555,185; 5,047,306; 5,572,274; 5,410,392; 5,436,706; 5,225,306; 5,266,435; 5,610,694; 5,346,796; 5,737,666; 5,745,829; 5,908,729; 5,300,390; 5,264,313; and PCT published applications WO 92/17823; WO 95/04307; WO 96/01442; WO 96/01442; WO

96/13760; WO 96/26469; WO 96/31809, the disclosures of all of which are incorporated by reference, describe preferred toners and charge directors for use in the present invention. Alternative development systems, suitable for the present invention include those described in US patents 5,436,706; 5,610,694; 5,737,666 and in PCT published application WO 96/31809, , the disclosures of all of which are incorporated by reference. Alternatively other toner and development systems, known in the art may be used.

However, the invention is not limited to a multicolor system of four colors. In some preferred embodiments, additional reservoirs containing additional colors, such as green, violet and/or orange, or special toners such as gold or silver may be added, each with its own supply conduit, nozzle, pump and collection conduit. Nor is the invention limited to any specific construction shown (for this or its other embodiments). In particular, it should be understood that all liquid toner systems known in the art are generally suitable for use in the various embodiments of the invention and that the system described is used as an example, for convenience, since it is well known to the inventors.

Preferably, a controller 97 is associated with imaging apparatus 120A. Controller 97 preferably receives signals from indicators and measuring devices of imaging apparatus 120A and preferably controls all pumps and all valves of imaging apparatus 120A. However, to avoid cluttering the figure, no lines are shown connecting the controller to the other elements.

Preferably, associated with each liquid-toner reservoir 40, 42, 44 and 46, there are toner-concentrate dispenser units 74, for replenishing the liquid-toner reservoirs with toner concentrate when required. Dispenser units 74 are similar in design to the toner-concentrate dispenser can described in US patent 5,655,194 "Dispenser Apparatus Especially for Liquid Toner Concentrate," the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference.

However, in the prior art, dispenser cans used for replenishing the liquid-toner reservoirs were in themselves disposable, and their replacement is inconvenient. Whereas dispenser cans 74, of the embodiment of Fig. 1B, unlike the prior art, are refilled automatically from a central system.

Reference is now made to Figs. 2A and 2B which are schematic diagrams of refillable toner-concentrate dispenser can 74 in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Preferably, dispenser can 74 comprises a housing 82 that is similar in construction to the housing of a commercially available aerosol spray can. Activation of an air pressure source 222, in response to a signal from controller 97, results in an ingress of pressurized air into a space 220, pressing against springs 219 and pushing down piston 91. In consequence,

piston 91 presses housing 82 against springs 211, thereby pushing in and opening spring-loaded valve 92. The liquid-toner concentrate inside housing 82 is continuously under constant, high pressure. Therefore, when valve 92 opens, a measured amount of toner concentrate is discharged from a space 96, via feed line 100, to a liquid toner reservoir such as reservoir 40. This open position is illustrated in Fig. 2A. After a predetermined time period, operation of air pressure source 222 is suspended, and pressurized air is removed from a region 220. The drop in air pressure within region 220 to the ambient air pressure, results in axial movement of housing 82 and piston 91 towards an end portion 208, due to the tension release effect of springs 211 and 219, thereby closing valve 92 and bringing can 74 to the closed position shown in Fig. 2B.

In a preferred embodiment of the invention, dispenser can 74 comprises a feed line 106 (shown on Figs. 2A, 2B and on Figs. 1B and 1C), through which dispenser can 74 is kept full of toner concentrate at high pressure. Preferably, line 106 is of a flexible material, at least near dispenser can 74, in order to accommodate the travel incurred by line 106 and housing 82 in the opening and closing of valve 92. Preferably, the toner concentrate in line 106 is constantly under high pressure by pump 136. In consequence, volume 96 of dispenser can 74 is likewise constantly under high pressure. Alternatively, but less preferably, line 106 has a valve, and dispenser can 74 is refilled at intervals, for example, at constant time intervals.

Reference is now made to Fig. 3 which schematically illustrates a reservoir 40 of imaging apparatus 120A, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention, for example, containing yellow toner. Preferably, the other liquid-toner reservoirs are substantially identical in structure. Preferably, liquid-toner reservoir 40 comprises a device for measuring optical density 132, in order to determine if replenishment of toner concentrate is required. Preferably, device 132 is similar in design to any of the prior art designs described in the background section. Alternatively, device 132 may be any device for measuring concentration of toner particles in the liquid toner, as known in the art. Preferably, device 132 measures the optical density continuously. Alternatively, device 132 measures the optical density periodically. Preferably, device 132 sends signals to controller 97 indicating the optical density and by inference, the toner particle concentration. Preferably, when controller 97 receives a signal that yellow liquid-toner reservoir 40 requires replenishment of toner concentrate, it activates air pressure source 222, thereby opening valve 92 of feed line 100 of yellow toner-concentrate dispenser can 74 (shown also on Fig. 1B). In this manner, only a single reservoir, in this case, yellow liquid-toner reservoir 40, is replenished with toner concentrate from yellow dispenser can 74.

In preferred embodiments of the invention, the toner concentrate contains a pre-determined concentration of charge directors, generally less than that required for proper charging of the liquid toner.

Preferably, as shown in Fig. 1B, liquid-toner reservoirs 40, 42, 44 and 46 and carrier-
5 liquid reservoir 32 are in communication with each other so that when the volume of liquid-toner in any reservoir is low, it is refilled from carrier liquid reservoir 32.

Preferably, as shown in Fig. 3, liquid-toner reservoirs 40 comprise a device 324, as known in the art, for measuring the level of liquid in a reservoir, in order to determine if an addition of carrier liquid is required. Preferably, device 324 measures the level of liquid
10 continuously. Alternatively, device 324 measures the level of liquid periodically. Preferably, when the level of liquid in reservoir 40 is low, device 324 sends a signal to controller 97.

Preferably, as shown in Fig. 1B, when controller 97 receives a signal that yellow liquid-toner reservoir 40 requires replenishment of carrier liquid, it activates a pump 122 of a line 115, (which branches out to four lines 116 leading to the four liquid-toner reservoirs) and
15 opens one of four valves 118 (on lines 116), in particular valve 118 associated with yellow reservoir 40, so that yellow reservoir 40 is replenished with carrier liquid.

Preferably, reservoir 32 also comprises a similar device 324. Preferably, when the level of liquid in reservoir 32 is low, device 324 of reservoir 32 sends a signal to controller 97 that refilling is required. Refilling from central system 110, via feed line 108 will be described
20 below.

In a preferred embodiment of the invention, as shown in Fig. 1B, imaging apparatus 120A comprises a charge-director tank 125 for replenishing the liquid-toner reservoirs with charge director.

Preferably, as shown in Fig. 3, liquid-toner reservoir 40 comprises a device 206 for
25 measuring the conductivity of the liquid toner in reservoir 40, in order to determine if replenishment of charge director is required. Preferably, device 206 measures the conductivity continuously. Alternatively, device 206 measures the conductivity periodically. Preferably, when the conductivity is low, device 206 sends a signal to controller 97.

Preferably, as shown in Fig. 1B, replenishment of charge director from tank 125 to the
30 liquid-toner reservoirs is carried out in conjunction with replenishment of carrier liquid, because of the very minute quantity of charge director that is required. Preferably, when controller 97 receives a signal that yellow liquid-toner reservoir 40 requires replenishment of charge-director, it stores the information until it receives a signal that yellow liquid-toner reservoir 40 also requires replenishment of carrier liquid.

At that point, controller 97 activates a pump 124 of a line 123, (which branches out to four lines 126 leading to four carrier-liquid lines 116). . Controller 97 also opens one of the four valves 128, in particular, valve 128 associated with yellow reservoir 40. Replenishment of charge director is made to the one carrier-liquid line 116 that leads to yellow reservoir 40.

5 Controller 97 then activates pump 122 of line 115 and opens valve 118 of line 116 associated with yellow reservoir 40. In this manner, the flow of carrier liquid from reservoir 32 to yellow reservoir 40 carries with it the required amount of charge director to yellow reservoir 40. Preferably, the outlets of charge-director lines 126 to carrier-liquid lines 116 are very close to the outlets of carrier-liquid lines 116 to reservoirs 40-46. This is desirable since the quantity of
10 carrier liquid dispensed, while much greater than that of the charge director solution, is still relatively small. Such placement assures that all of the charge director solution is flushed from the feed lines and into the respective reservoir by the carrier liquid.

In some preferred embodiments, the outlets of charge-director lines 126 to carrier-liquid lines 116 is on the liquid-toner-reservoir sides of valves 118. Less preferably, the
15 outlets of charge-director lines 126 to carrier-liquid lines 116 is on the carrier-liquid-reservoir side of valves 118.

It should be understood that while the above automatic charge-director dispensing apparatus is described in the context of a local charge director dispenser, associated with individual imaging apparatus, this mechanism and method are equally applicable to a central
20 charge director dispensing system, as described below.

Reference is now made to Fig. 1C which is a schematic block diagram of central system 110 in communication with three imaging apparatus 120A, 120B and 120C, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Preferably, central system 110 comprises four tanks 134 of toner concentrates for the
25 four respective colors. Preferably, associated with each tank there is a high viscosity pump 136 for high-viscosity materials such as Blagdon Hopper-type pump model 15-1/2". Preferably, associated with each tank are feed lines 106 to the four refillable dispenser can 74 of each imaging apparatus (shown on Fig. 1A).

As shown in Fig. 1C, central system 110 preferably further comprises a carrier-liquid
30 tank 140. Associated with the carrier liquid tank there is a pump 142, feed lines 108 to the carrier-liquid reservoirs of each imaging apparatus 120 and a valve 109, near the outlet to reservoir 32 of each imaging apparatus 120 (shown on Fig. 1A).

Preferably, central system 110 further comprises a controller 130 which receives signals and information from individual controllers 97 of each imaging apparatus 120 and

which controls pump 142 of central system 110 and valves 109 of each imaging apparatus 120. (To avoid cluttering the figure, no lines are shown connecting controller 130 to the other elements.)

Note that in the preferred embodiments, pumps 136 operate constantly, so that lines 106 and dispenser cans 74 are maintained at high pressure, constantly. Alternatively or additionally, central controller 130 and imaging apparatus controllers 97 work together in some other manner to control the pumps and valves of the central system and of the individual imaging apparatus. Alternatively or additionally, appropriate circuitry is used in place of or in addition to central controller 130 and imaging apparatus controllers 97.

Preferably, as device 324 of carrier-liquid reservoir 32 of imaging apparatus 120A sends a signal to imaging apparatus controller 97 that reservoir 32 is low in carrier liquid, controller 97 sends a signal to central controller 130 of central system 110.

Preferably, central controller 130 activates pump 142 of carrier-liquid tank 140 and opens valve 109 of carrier-liquid feed line 108. In this manner, carrier-liquid reservoir 32 of imaging apparatus 120A is replenished with carrier liquid.

Note that, except for central feed lines 106, central feed line 108 and valve 109, imaging apparatus 120A is similar to any prior art imaging apparatus. Thus, imaging apparatus 120A may be any prior art liquid toner imaging apparatus that is fitted with central feed lines 106 and 108.

It should be noted that, while the embodiment of Figs. 1-3 include central supply of toner concentrate, carrier liquid and charge director, other preferred embodiments of the invention may have any one or two of these components supplied centrally and the other(s) supplied locally, at each printer. Furthermore, while the above embodiment shows toner concentrate delivered first from a central source to a local dispenser, in some preferred embodiments of the invention, the toner concentrate may be delivered directly to the liquid toner reservoirs. In preferred embodiments wherein the toner concentrate is delivered from the central system directly to the liquid toner reservoirs, each line 106 has a valve, and controller 97 opens the valve of a particular liquid-toner reservoir whenever replenishment of toner concentrate to that reservoir is required. Preferably, the valve is open for a predetermined interval, so as to control the amount of toner concentrate that is dispensed.

Reference is now made to Figs. 4A, 4B and 4C which are schematic block diagrams of a multi-printer facility 400 in accordance with another preferred embodiment of the present invention. Fig. 4A illustrates multi-printer facility 400 which comprises a central system 410 in communication with 3 identical multicolor, electrostatic, imaging apparatus 420A, 420B

and 420C via feed lines 412 and 414. Fig. 4B illustrates single imaging apparatus 420A. Fig. 4C illustrates central system 410.

Preferably, in system 400, imaging apparatus 420A, 420B and 420C do not have their own liquid-toner reservoirs. Rather, working liquid toner of the different colors is supplied directly from central system 410, via central feed lines 456 to spray nozzles 57. Preferably, four central pumps 448 are provided at the entrances of central feed lines 456 for providing a desired amount of pressure to feed the colored liquid toner to a series of spray nozzles 57 of imaging apparatus 420A. Preferably, the pumps work continuously and valves are provided at each unit, controlled by a local controller. Within imaging apparatus 420A, used liquid toner of the different colors is collected into a series of collection trays 65 and returned to the proper central reservoirs through a series of central collection conduits 472. Four central pumps 473 provide the desired amount of pressure to collect the colored liquid toners.

An advantage of this system over the embodiments of Figs. 1-3 is that the liquid toner is not subject to the environment within the imaging apparatus, for example, the heat that is generated by the printing or copying process. Rather, the liquid toner may be kept in a more easily controlled, more optimal environment

Preferably, central system 410 of colored liquid toner reservoirs is similar in design to the colored liquid-toner reservoirs of imaging apparatus 120A, and comprises a carrier-liquid reservoir 432 for replenishing liquid toner reservoirs 440, 442, 444 and 446 with carrier liquid. Preferably, central system 410 also comprises a charge-director tank 425 for replenishing the liquid toner reservoirs with charge director. Preferably, each of liquid-toner reservoirs 440, 442, 444 and 446 comprises a device 324 for measuring the liquid level within the reservoir. Preferably, each of the liquid-toner reservoirs comprises a device 206 for measuring the conductivity within each reservoir. Preferably, a controller 497 receives signals from the different measuring devices and controls pump 422 and valves 418 of carrier-liquid lines 416 and pump 424 and valves 428 of charge-director lines 426, in the same manner as described above.

In some preferred embodiments of the invention, central liquid toner reservoirs 440, 442, 444 and 446 are replenished with colored toner concentrate from dispenser cans 466 which comprise valves 492 and which may be similar in design to the dispenser cans described in US patent 5,655,194 "Dispenser Apparatus Especially for Liquid Toner Concentrate," the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference. Alternatively, central liquid toner reservoirs 440, 442, 444 and 446 are replenished with colored toner concentrate from a system of tanks such as toner-concentrate tanks 134 of Fig. 1C and pumps

such as heavy viscosity pumps 136 of Fig. 1C. Preferably, each of liquid-toner reservoirs 440, 442, 444 and 446 comprises device 132 for measuring the optical density of the liquid toner within the reservoir. Preferably, a controller 497 receives signals from device 132 and activates the valves necessary for the replenishment.

5 In some preferred embodiments, central system 410 comprises more than four colored liquid toner reservoirs and includes special colors, for example, gold or silver, metallic colors or other process colors such as purple, orange and (or) green.

Reference is now made to Figs. 5A, 5B and 5C which are schematic block diagrams of a multi-printer facility 500 in accordance with another preferred embodiment of the present invention. Fig. 5A illustrates multi-printer facility 500 which comprises a central system 510
10 in communication with 3 identical multicolor, electrostatic, imaging apparatus 520A, 520B and 520C via feed lines 512 and 514. Fig. 5B illustrates single imaging apparatus 520A. Fig. 5C illustrates central system 510.

Preferably, in system 500, imaging apparatus 520A does not have liquid-toner
15 reservoirs. Furthermore, imaging apparatus 520A does not have a carrier-liquid reservoir. Imaging apparatus 520A receives working liquid toner and carrier liquid from central system 510. Preferably, working liquid toner is supplied to imaging apparatus 520A from central liquid toner reservoirs 540, 542, 544 and 546 via feed lines 556 and central pumps 548, as described with respect to Figs. 4A-4C. Preferably, used liquid toner is collected and returned
20 to central system 510 via feed lines 572 and central pumps 573, as described with respect to 4A-4C. Preferably, carrier liquid is supplied to imaging apparatus 520A from central carrier-liquid reservoir 532 via feed line 533 and central pump 535. Preferably, carrier liquid is returned to central system 510 via feed line 537 and central pump 531. Preferably, the carrier liquid is passed through a central separator 530 before returning to central carrier-liquid
25 reservoir 532. Alternatively or additionally, the carrier liquid of reservoir 532 is passed through a continuous filtering system comprising a filter 538 and a pump 534, or a filter at the output of the reservoir.

Preferably, central carrier-liquid reservoir 532 also replenishes central liquid toner reservoirs 540, 542, 544 and 546 with carrier liquid when necessary, as controlled by
30 controller 597. This system operates in much the same way as the carrier liquid replenishment of Figs. 1-3.

Preferably, a central charge-director tank 525 replenishes central liquid toner reservoirs 540, 542, 544 and 546 with charge director when necessary, as controlled by

controller 597. This system operates in much the same way as the charge director replenishment of Figs. 1-3.

Preferably, central liquid toner reservoirs 540, 542, 544 and 546 comprises a toner-concentrate replenishment system as controlled by controller 597. This system operates in much the same way as the toner concentrate replenishment of Fig. 4B.

In some preferred embodiments, central system 510 comprises more than four colored liquid toner reservoirs and includes special colors, for example, gold or silver, metallic colors or other process colors such as purple, orange and (or) green.

The present invention is not limited to the specific systems described. Rather, any combination of the features that have been described may be used. Alternatively, some features that have been described may be left out. It should be noted that, while the embodiments of Figs. 1-3 include central supply of toner concentrate, carrier liquid and charge director, other preferred embodiments of the invention may have any one or two of these components supplied centrally and the other(s) supplied locally, at each printer. Furthermore, while the above embodiment shows toner concentrate delivered first from a central source to a local dispenser, in some preferred embodiments of the invention, the toner concentrate may be delivered directly to the liquid toner reservoirs.

The present invention has been described using non-limiting detailed descriptions of preferred embodiments thereof that are provided by way of example and are not intended to limit the scope of the invention. Variations of embodiments described will occur to persons of the art. In particular, while a specific liquid toner imaging apparatus utilizing specific elements has been used for illustrative purposes, the imaging apparatus, including the structure of a printing engine or engines used therein may be of any suitable kind. Since, in general, all or nearly all liquid toner imaging apparatus require replenishment of one or more of toner concentrate, carrier liquid and charge director, the present invention is applicable to such apparatus, even if not referenced or described herein. The terms "comprise," "include," and "have" or their conjugates, when used herein, mean "including but not necessarily limited to." The scope of the invention is limited only by the following claims:

CLAIMS

1. A multi-printer system comprising:
 - a plurality of imaging apparatus, each said apparatus comprising at least one liquid-
5 toner reservoir, containing liquid toner;
 - a central source of toner concentrate;
 - a toner concentrate conduit which connects the central source to the individual
imaging apparatus; and
 - at least one toner-concentrate pump which pumps the toner concentrate from the
10 central source to the individual imaging apparatus.
2. A system according to claim 1 in which the imaging apparatus each comprise:
 - a toner-concentrate dispenser which dispenses toner concentrate to said liquid-toner
reservoir,
 - 15 wherein the toner concentrate conduit connects the central source to the toner
concentrate dispenser, such that toner concentrate is transferred from the central source to the
toner concentrate dispenser via the toner concentrate conduit.
3. A system according to claim 2 and comprising at least one controller.
20
4. A system according to claim 3, wherein:
 - the toner concentrate dispenser comprises a dispenser can; and
 - the can dispenses toner concentrate into the reservoir in response to a command from
the at least one controller.
 - 25
5. A system according to claim 3 or 4 wherein:
 - the central source of toner concentrate comprises a central container of toner
concentrate, containing a concentrate of the same color as a liquid-toner contained in a liquid-
toner reservoir of the imaging apparatus; and
 - 30 the toner concentrate conduit is a branching feed line comprising:
 - a junction having an input port and a plurality of output ports;
 - a line connecting the source with the input port; and
 - a plurality of lines, each connecting one of the output ports with a different
one of the imaging apparatus.

6. A system according to claim 5 wherein a toner-concentrate pump is located on each line connecting the source with an input port.

7. A system according to claim 6 wherein the toner-concentrate pump operates continuously.

8. A system according to any the claims 3-7 wherein the at least one toner-concentrate pump comprises a high-viscosity pump.

9. A system according to any of claims 3-8 wherein the imaging apparatus are multi-colored and comprising a plurality of central sources of toner concentrate, each having a different color of toner concentrate.

10. A system according to claim 9 wherein the plurality of liquid-toner reservoirs comprises liquid-toner reservoirs of at least yellow, magenta and cyan toner.

11. A system according to any of claims 3-10 wherein each liquid-toner reservoir comprises a particle density measurement device that measures a quantity related to the density of toner particles in the liquid toner and sends the measurements to the at least one controller and wherein the at least one controller transfers toner concentrate to the liquid toner reservoir responsive to the measurements.

12. A system according to any of claims 3-11 wherein:
each of the printing apparatus includes:

a carrier-liquid reservoir from which carrier liquid is supplied to the liquid-toner reservoir; and

at least one local carrier liquid conduit through which carrier liquid is supplied to the liquid-toner reservoir, responsive to commands from the at least one controller; and

the system includes:

a central source of carrier liquid; and

a central carrier liquid conduit which carries the carrier liquid to individual ones of the carrier liquid reservoirs responsive to commands from the at least one controller.

13. A multi-printer system comprising:

a plurality of imaging apparatus, each said apparatus comprising a liquid-toner reservoir;

a central source of carrier liquid;

at least one controller; and

a central carrier-liquid conduit which connects the central source of carrier liquid to each of the imaging apparatus and carries carrier liquid to the individual apparatus responsive to a command from the at least one controller.

14. A system according to claim 13 wherein the imaging apparatus includes:

a carrier-liquid reservoir from which carrier liquid is supplied to the liquid-toner reservoir,

wherein the central carrier liquid conduit carries the carrier liquid to individual ones of the carrier liquid reservoirs responsive to commands from the at least one controller.

15. A system according to any of claims 12-14 wherein the central carrier-liquid conduit comprises a branching carrier-liquid feed line, comprising:

a proximal end at the central source of carrier liquid; and

distal ends at the imaging apparatus.

16. A system according to claim 15 wherein:

the branching carrier-liquid feed line comprises valves at its distal ends; and

the valves are controlled by the at least one controller.

17. A system according to claim 15 or claim 16 wherein:

the carrier-liquid conduit comprises a pump; and

the pump is controlled by the at least one controller.

18. A system according to any of claims 12-17 wherein:

each carrier-liquid reservoir comprises a carrier-liquid level indicator; and

measurements of the carrier-liquid level indicator are sent to the at least one controller.

19. A system according to any of claims 12-18 wherein each imaging apparatus comprises a conductivity measurement device that measures the conductivity of liquid toner in the liquid toner reservoir; and including:

a source of charge director solution; and

5 at least one charge director solution conduit that communicates between the source of charge director solution and the at least one carrier liquid conduit, wherein a quantity of charge director solution is sent to the reservoir responsive to a low conductivity measurement.

20. A printer system comprising:

10 at least one liquid toner reservoir, each said reservoir including a first detector that provides a first signal when the amount of liquid toner therein falls below a given volume and a second detector that measures the conductivity of the liquid toner and produces a second signal responsive thereto;

a source of carrier liquid;

15 a source of charge director solution;

at least one controller;

at least one carrier liquid conduit that communicates between the source of carrier liquid and the at least one liquid toner reservoir;

20 at least one charge director solution conduit that communicates between the source of charge director solution and the at least one carrier liquid conduit,

wherein the controller is operative to transfer a first quantity of carrier liquid to a liquid toner reservoir via the charge director conduit when the first signal associated with the reservoir indicates a low volume condition for the reservoir and is operative to send a second quantity of charge director solution to the reservoir via the charge-director and carrier-liquid conduits, responsive to the second signal associated with the reservoir indicating a low conductivity condition.

21. A system according to claim 19 or claim 20 wherein, in transferring the charge director to the reservoir, the controller is operative to transfer the quantity of charge director solution to the local carrier conduit from which it is carried by a subsequent transfer of carrier liquid to the reservoir.

22. A system according to claim 21 wherein the controller is operative to send the charge director solution to the local carrier liquid conduit immediately prior to sending carrier liquid to the reservoir such that the carrier liquid carries the charge director into the reservoir.

5 23. A system according to any of claims 19-22 wherein the quantity of charge director solution sent to the liquid toner reservoir is substantially less than the quantity of carrier liquid sent to the reservoir.

24. A system according to claim 23 wherein the charge director conduit joins the carrier
10 liquid conduit near an entrance to the reservoir from the carrier liquid conduit.

25. A multi-printer system comprising:

a plurality of imaging apparatus, each said apparatus comprising:

a printing engine

15 a liquid-toner inlet line from which fresh liquid toner is fed to the printing engine;

a central source of liquid toner;

a liquid-toner feed which connects the central source to the liquid-toner inlet line;

at least one controller which transfers fresh liquid toner from the central source, via
20 said feed.

26. A system according to claim 25 wherein each imaging apparatus includes:

a liquid-toner exhaust line which collects discharged liquid toner from the printing engine and delivers it to the central source.

25 27. A system according to claim 26 wherein the liquid-toner feed is a branching feed line comprising:

a junction;

a first feed line connecting the central source with the junction; and

30 a plurality of second feed lines connecting the junction with respective liquid-toner inlet lines of the imaging apparatus.

28. A system according to claim 27 wherein:

each of said plurality of feed lines includes a valve controlled by the at least one controller.

29. A system according to any of claims 25-28 wherein:

the imaging apparatus are multi-colored; and

a liquid-toner inlet line comprises a plurality of liquid-toner inlet lines.

30. A system according to any of claims 25-29 wherein the central source of liquid toner is multi-colored, comprising a plurality of central containers of liquid toner of different colors.

31. A system according to claim 30 wherein the plurality of liquid-toner containers comprises liquid-toner containers of at least yellow, magenta and cyan toner.

32. A system according to any of claims 25-31 and including:

a central source of carrier liquid; and

a carrier liquid conduit that connects the central source to the individual imaging apparatus,

wherein the at least one controller is operative to transfer carrier liquid from the central source of carrier liquid to the individual imaging apparatus as required by the apparatus for cleaning.

33. A system according to claim 32 and including a carrier-liquid pump that pumps carrier-liquid to respective imaging apparatus responsive to commands from said at least one controller.

34. A system according to claim 32 or claim 33 and including a carrier liquid return conduit that collects carrier liquid after use by the imaging device and transfers it to the central source of carrier liquid.

35. A system according to claim 34 and including a separator that removes toner particles from the collected carrier liquid prior to its delivery to the central source of carrier liquid.

36. A multi-printer system comprising:

a plurality of imaging apparatus,
a central source of carrier liquid;
at least one controller;

5 a central carrier-liquid conduit which connects the central source of carrier liquid to each of the imaging apparatus and carries carrier liquid to the individual apparatus responsive to a command from the at least one controller.

37. A system according to claim 36 and including a carrier-liquid exhaust line which collects discharged carrier liquid from the imaging apparatus and returns it to the central
10 source of carrier liquid.

38. A system according to any of the preceding claims wherein the imaging apparatus comprise electrostatographic imaging apparatus.

15 39. A system according to any of the preceding claims wherein the imaging apparatus comprise electrophotographic apparatus.

40. A system according to any of the preceding claims wherein the imaging apparatus comprise printers.

20

41. A system according to any of the preceding claims wherein the imaging apparatus comprise copiers.

42. A method of dispensing toner concentrate in a multi-printer facility comprising a
25 plurality of imaging apparatus, each said apparatus comprising a liquid toner reservoir, the method comprising:

providing a central source of toner concentrate; and

automatically transferring toner concentrate from said central source to individual imaging apparatus.

30

43. A method according to claim 42 wherein transferring comprises transferring toner concentrate directly to a liquid-toner reservoir of the individual imaging apparatus, in response to a deficiency of toner concentrate in the reservoir.

44. A method according to claim 42 wherein transferring comprises transferring toner concentrate to a liquid-toner concentrate dispenser associated with a liquid-toner reservoir in the individual imaging apparatus.

5 45. A method of providing liquid toner in a multi-printer facility comprising a plurality of imaging apparatus, comprising:

providing a central source of liquid toner; and

automatically transferring liquid toner from said central source to individual imaging apparatus in response to a need of liquid toner in said imaging apparatus.

10

46. A method of providing carrier liquid in a multi-printer facility comprising a plurality of imaging apparatus, comprising:

providing a central source of carrier liquid; and

15 automatically transferring carrier liquid from said central source to individual imaging apparatus in response to a need of carrier liquid in said imaging apparatus.

1/12

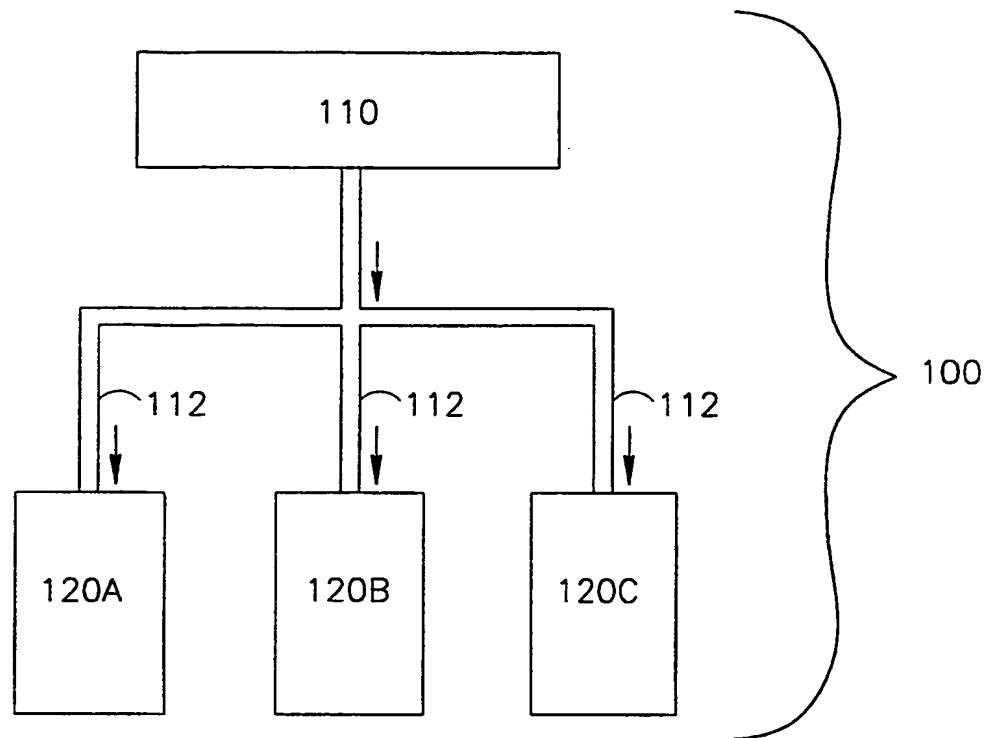


FIG.1A

2/12

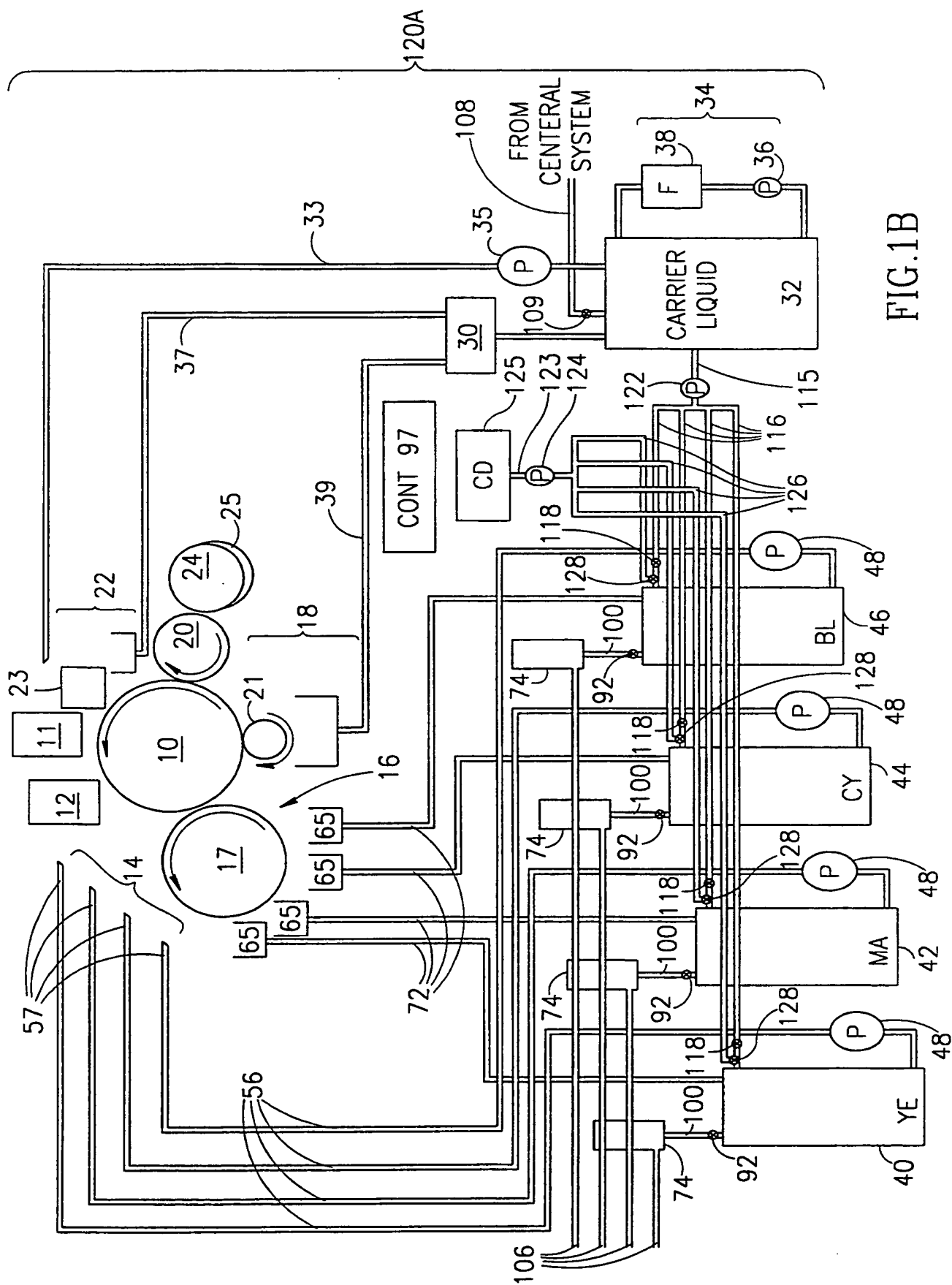


FIG.1B

3/12

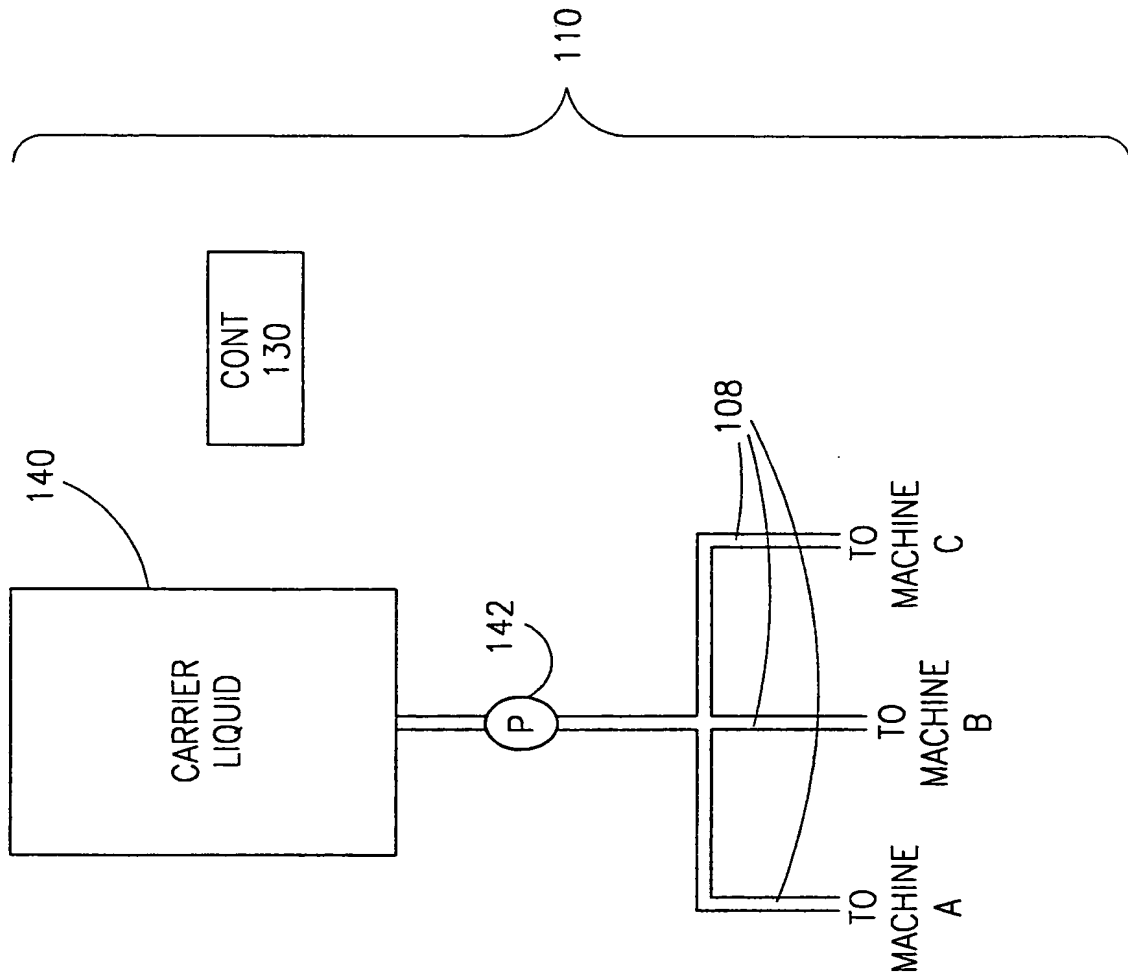
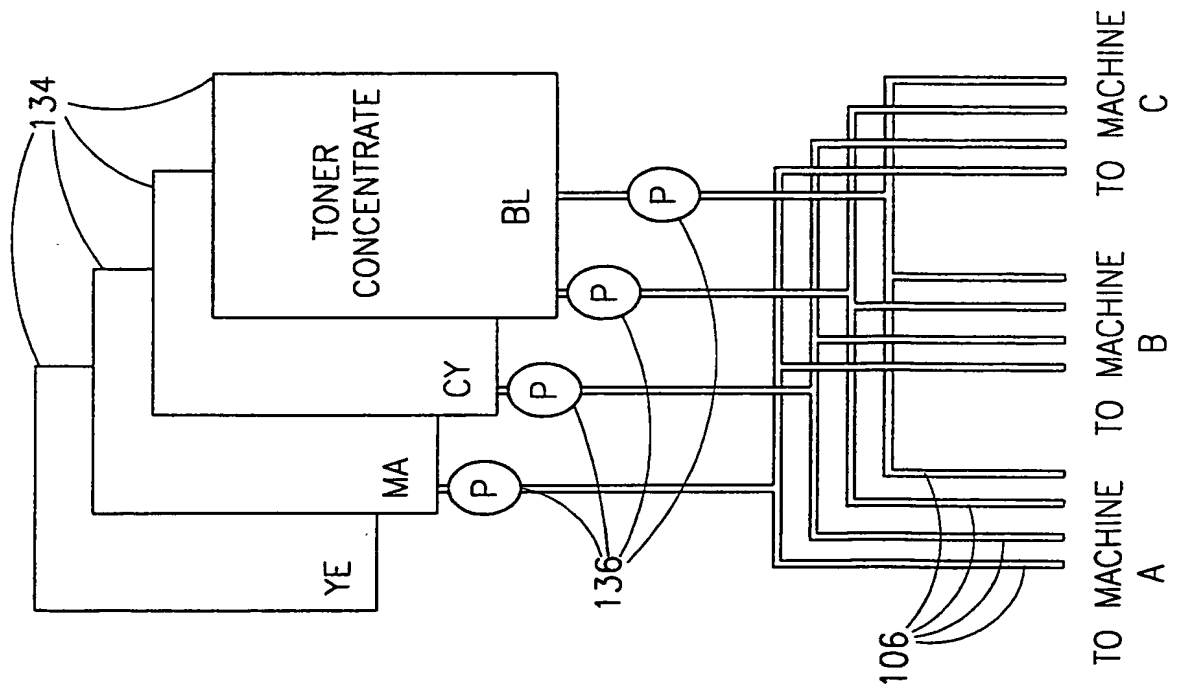


FIG.1C



4/12

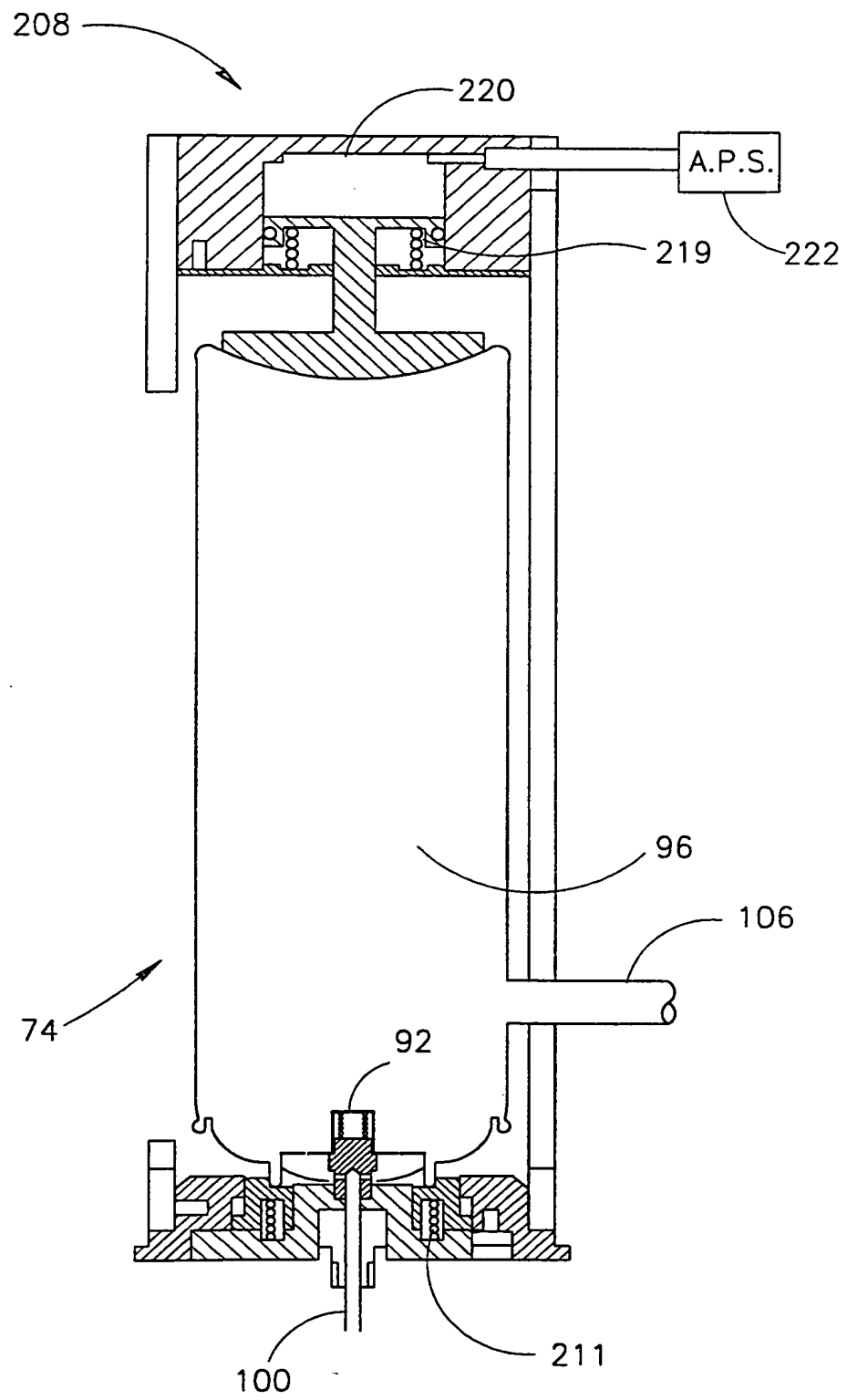


FIG.2A

5/12

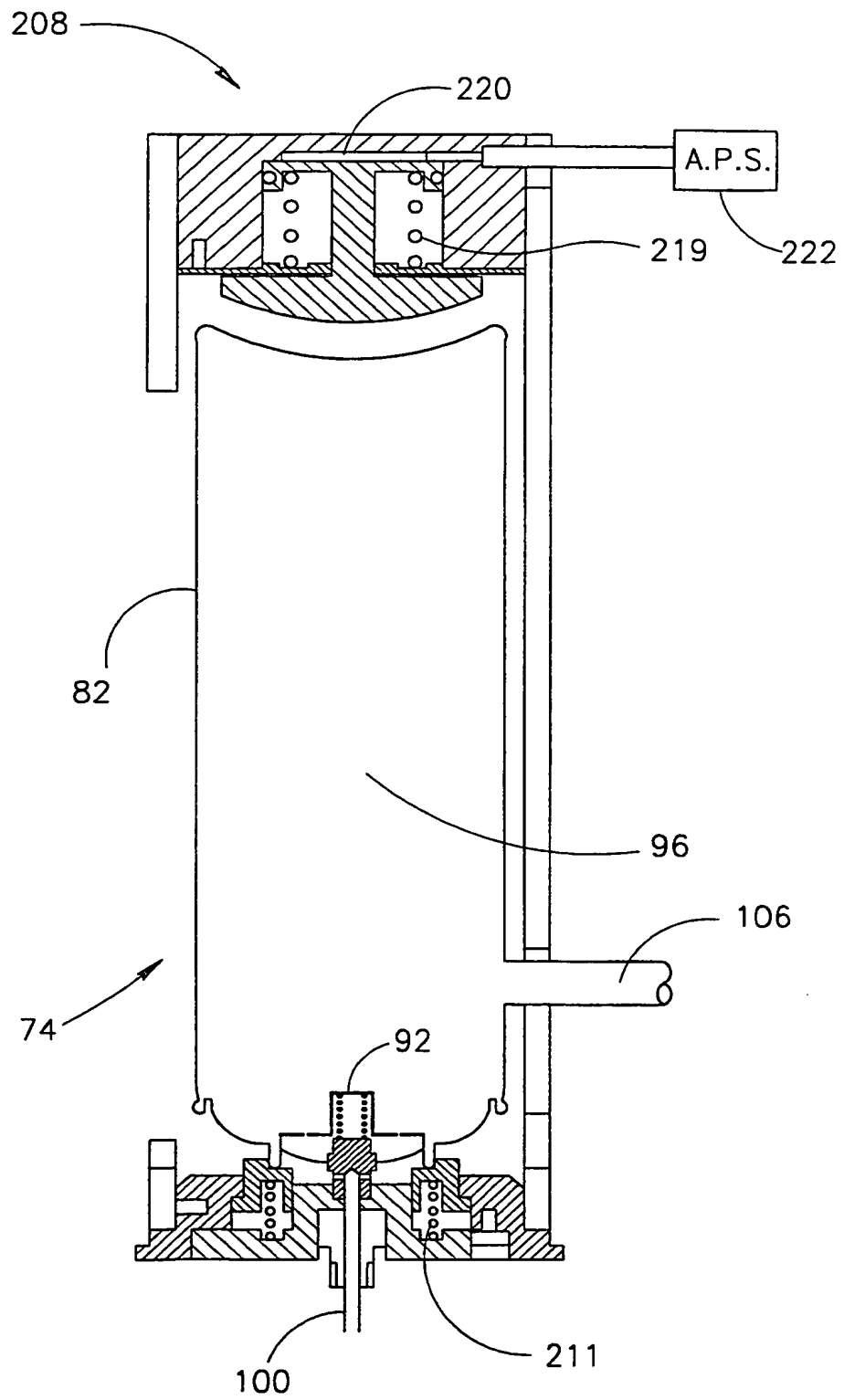
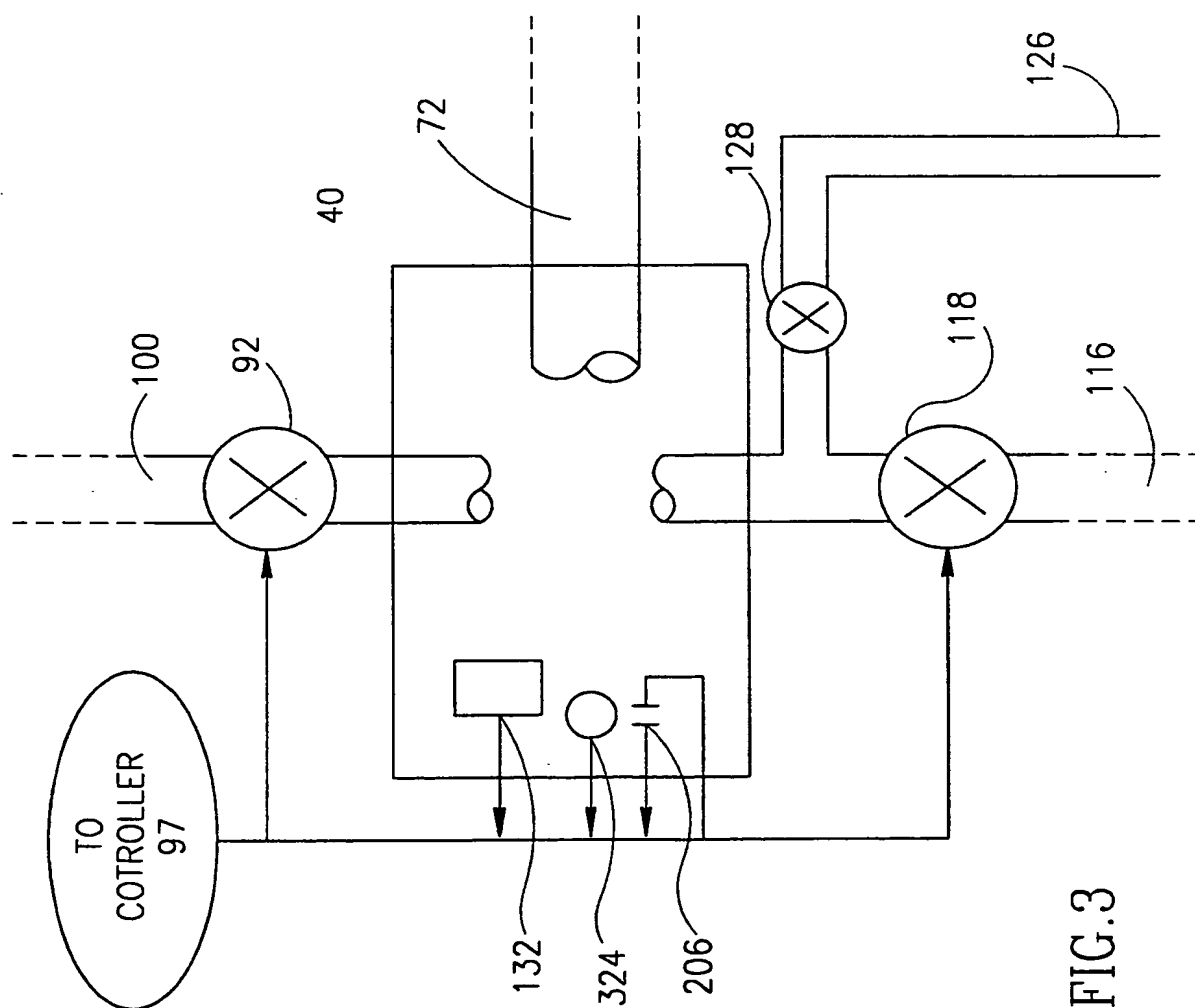


FIG. 2B



7/12

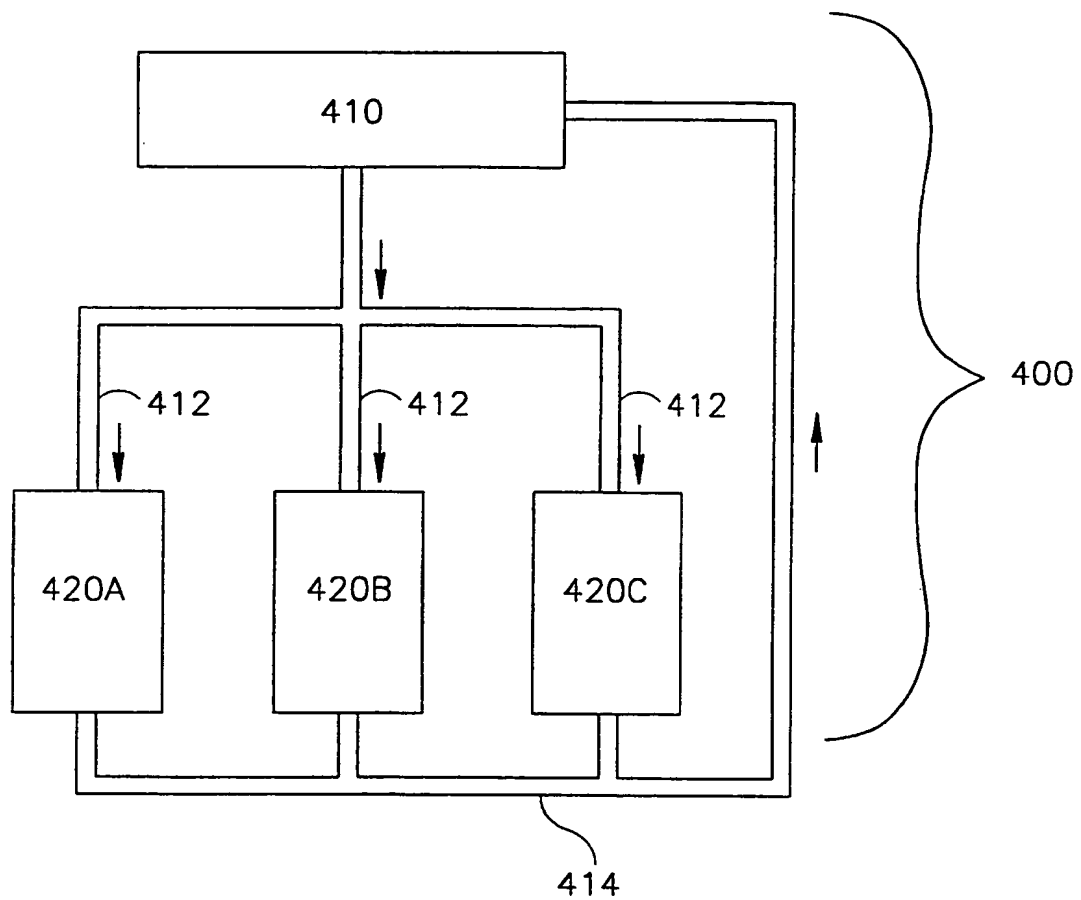


FIG.4A

8/12

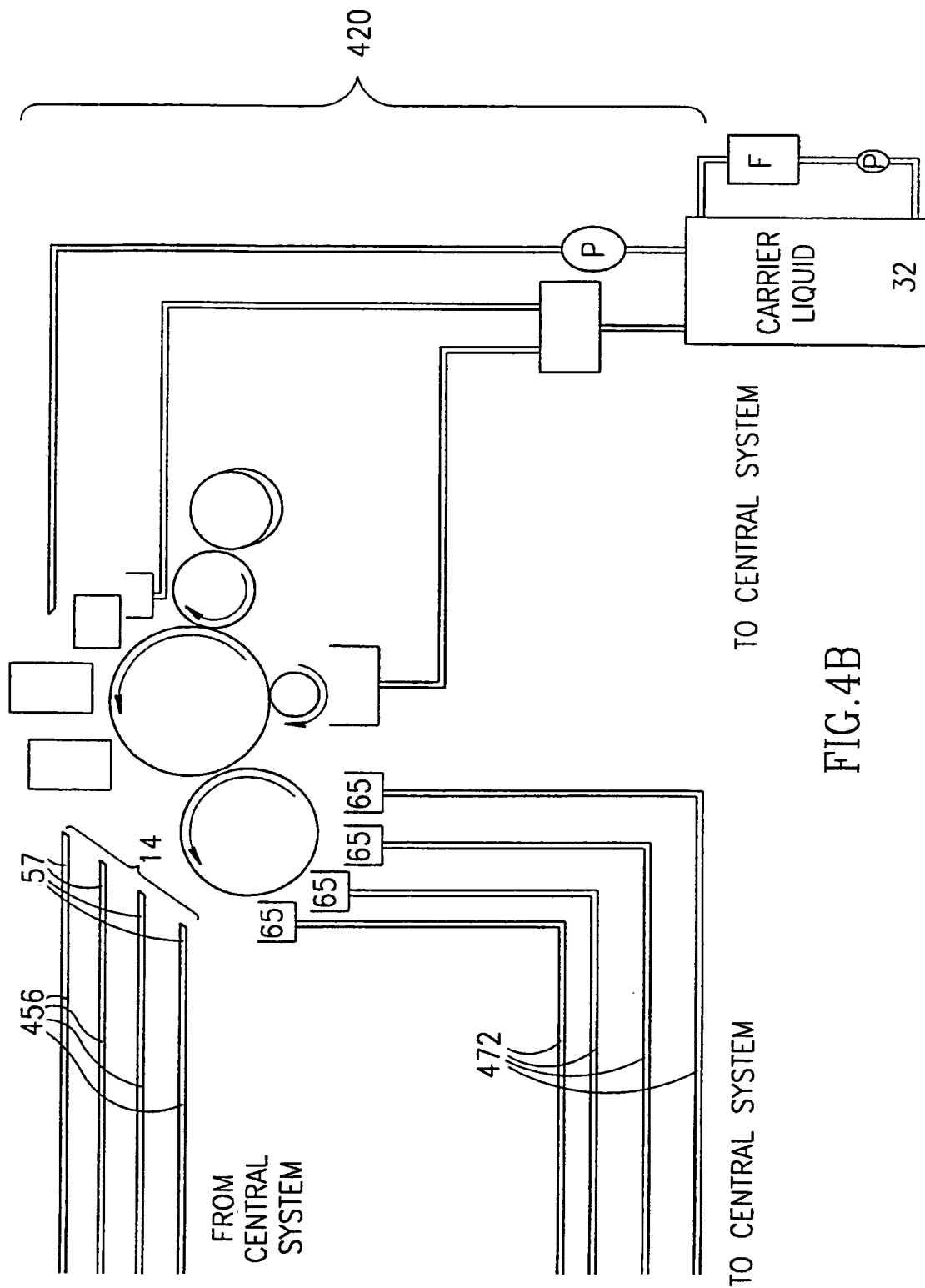


FIG. 4B

9/12

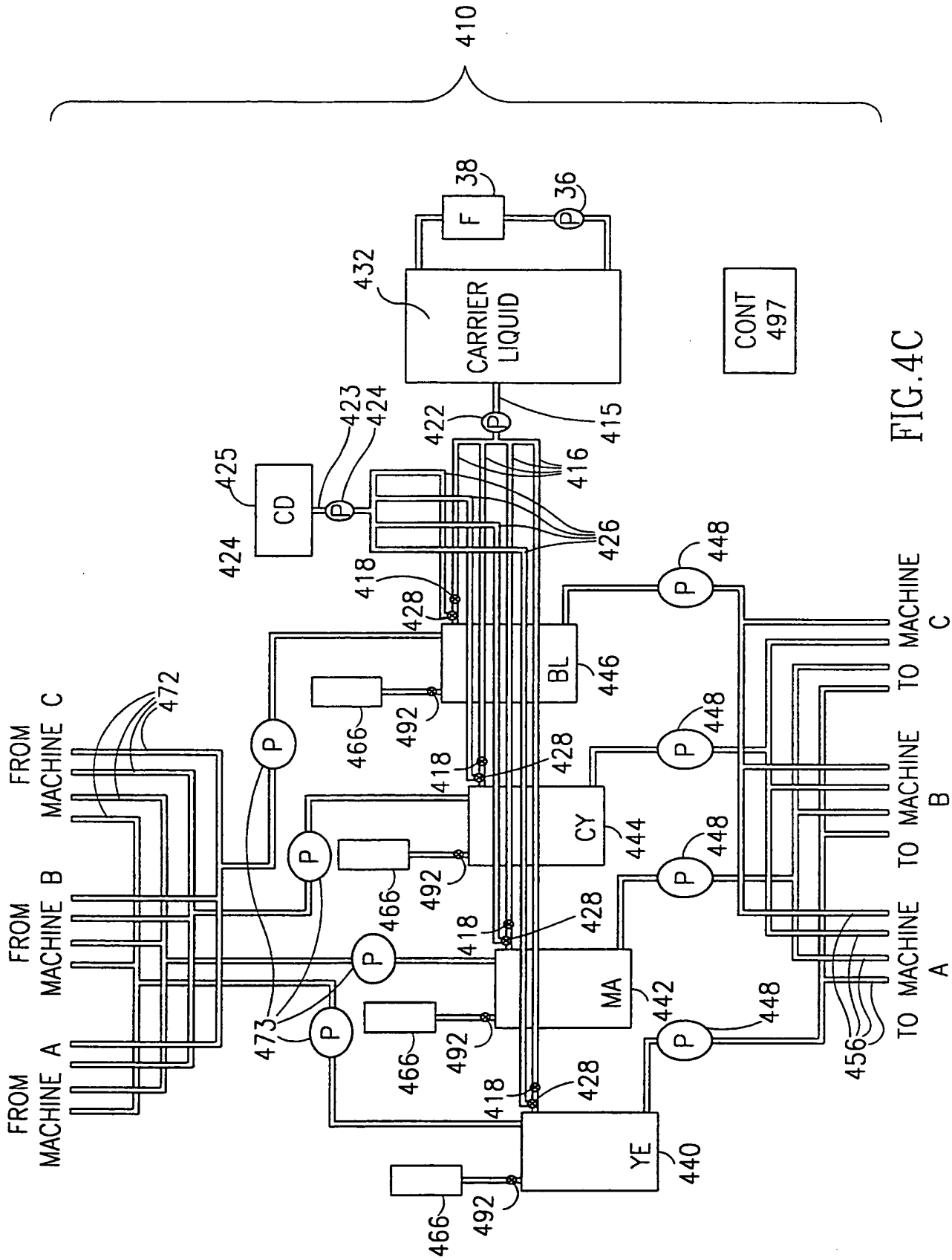


FIG. 4C

10/12

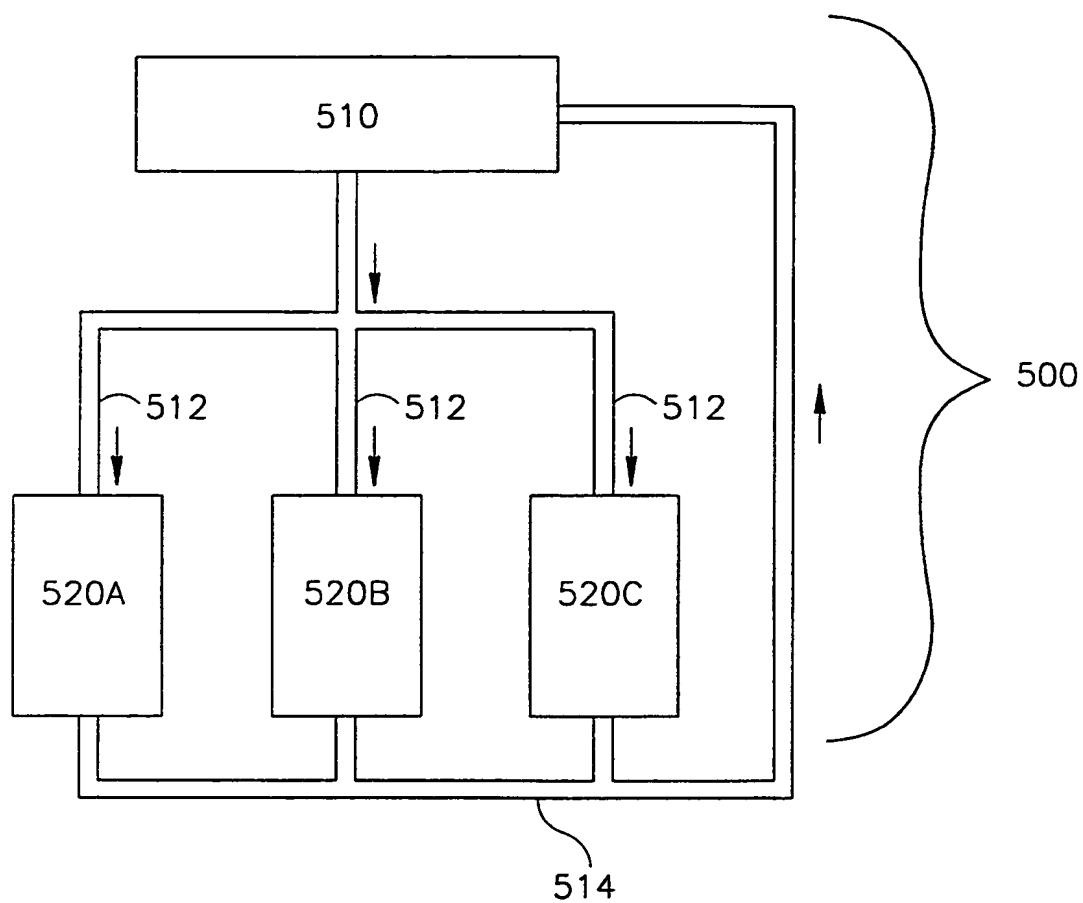


FIG.5A

11/12

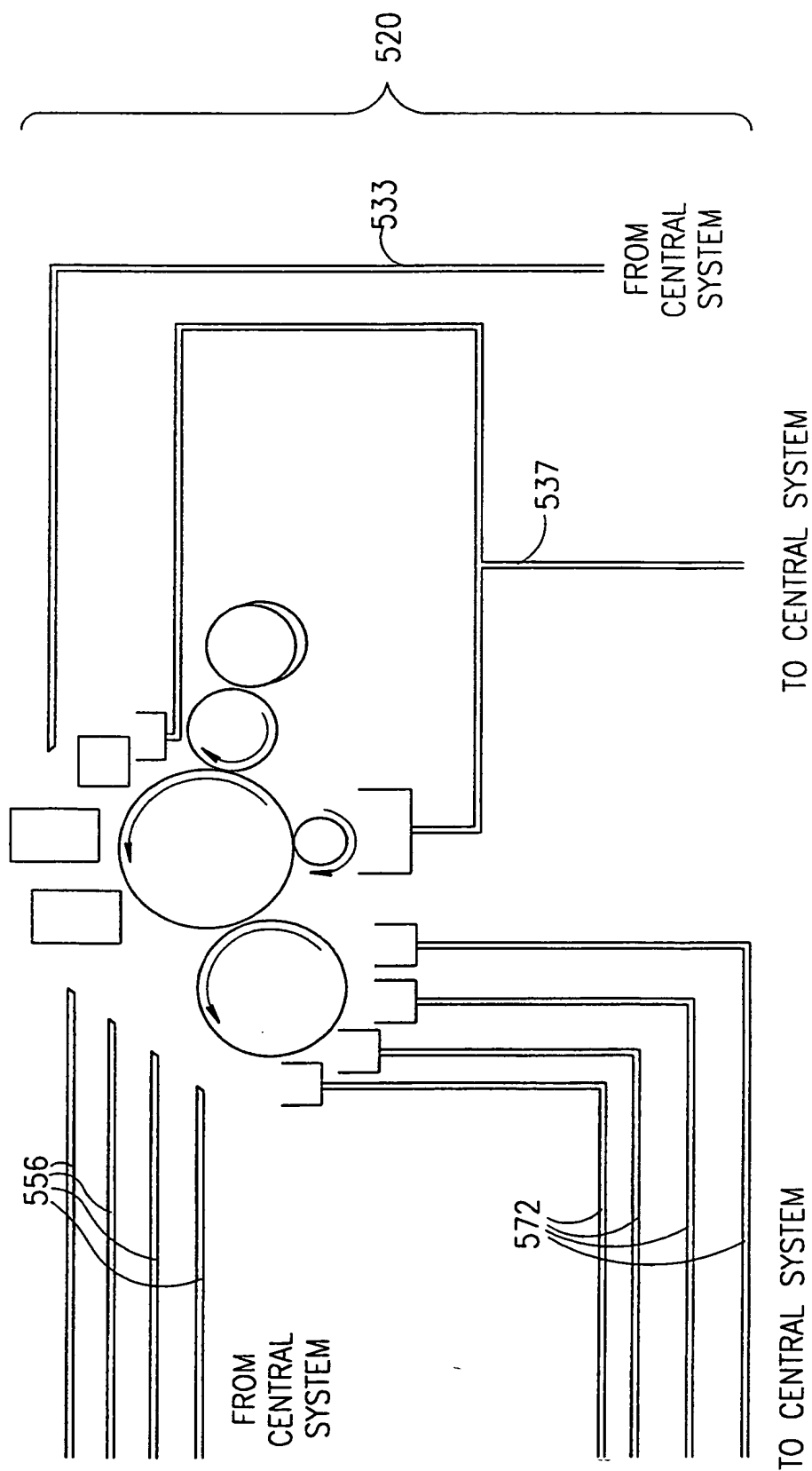


FIG. 5B

12/12

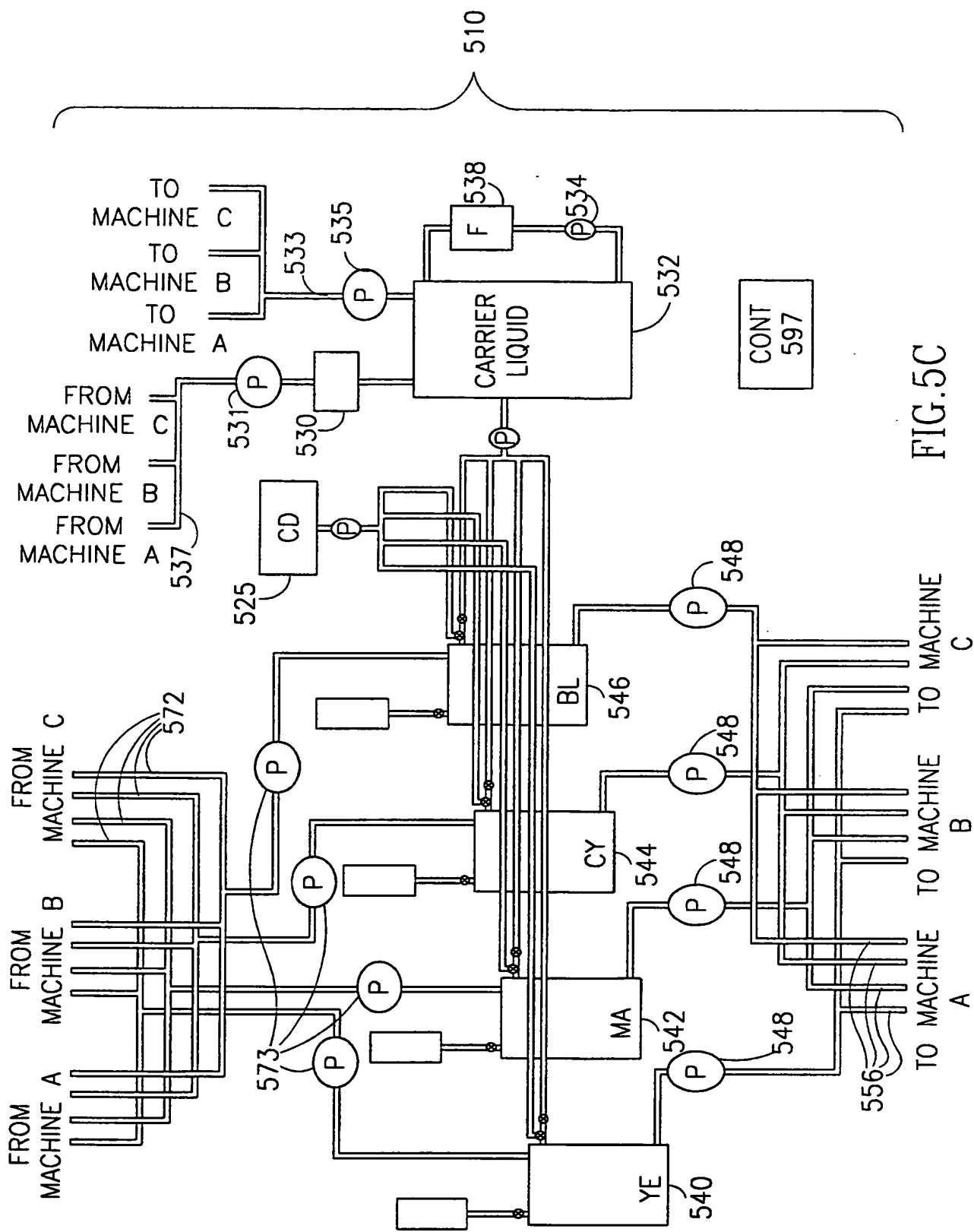


FIG. 5C

6. A system according to claim 5 wherein a toner-concentrate pump is located on each line connecting the source with an input port.

5 7. A system according to claim 6 wherein the toner-concentrate pump operates continuously.

8. A system according to any the claims 3-7 wherein the at least one toner-concentrate pump comprises a high-viscosity pump.

10

9. A system according to any of claims 3-8 wherein the imaging apparatus are multi-colored and comprising a plurality of central sources of toner concentrate, each having a different color of toner concentrate.

15 10. A system according to claim 9 wherein the plurality of liquid-toner reservoirs comprises liquid-toner reservoirs of at least yellow, magenta and cyan toner.

11. A system according to any of claims 3-10 wherein each liquid-toner reservoir comprises a particle density measurement device that measures a quantity related to the density of toner particles in the liquid toner and sends the measurements to the at least one controller and wherein the at least one controller transfers toner concentrate to the liquid toner reservoir responsive to the measurements.

12. A system according to any of claims 3-11 wherein:
25 each of the printing apparatus includes:

a carrier-liquid reservoir from which carrier liquid is supplied to the liquid-toner reservoir; and

at least one local carrier liquid conduit through which carrier liquid is supplied to the liquid-toner reservoir, responsive to commands from the at least one controller; and

30 the system includes:

a central source of carrier liquid; and

a central carrier liquid conduit which carries the carrier liquid to individual ones of the carrier liquid reservoirs responsive to commands from the at least one controller.

13. A multi-printer system comprising:

a plurality of imaging apparatus, each said apparatus comprising a liquid-toner reservoir;

a central source of carrier liquid;

at least one controller; and

a central carrier-liquid conduit which connects the central source of carrier liquid to each of the imaging apparatus and carries carrier liquid to the individual apparatus responsive to a command from the at least one controller.

14. A system according to claim 13 wherein the imaging apparatus includes:

a carrier-liquid reservoir from which carrier liquid is supplied to the liquid-toner reservoir,

wherein the central carrier liquid conduit carries the carrier liquid to individual ones of the carrier liquid reservoirs responsive to commands from the at least one controller.

15. A system according to any of claims 12-14 wherein the central carrier-liquid conduit comprises a branching carrier-liquid feed line, comprising:

a proximal end at the central source of carrier liquid; and

distal ends at the imaging apparatus.

16. A system according to claim 15 wherein:

the branching carrier-liquid feed line comprises valves at its distal ends; and
the valves are controlled by the at least one controller.

17. A system according to claim 15 or claim 16 wherein:

the carrier-liquid conduit comprises a pump; and

the pump is controlled by the at least one controller.

18. A system according to any of claims 12-17 wherein:

each carrier-liquid reservoir comprises a carrier-liquid level indicator; and

measurements of the carrier-liquid level indicator are sent to the at least one controller.

19. A system according to any of claims 12-18 wherein each imaging apparatus comprises a conductivity measurement device that measures the conductivity of liquid toner in the liquid toner reservoir; and including:

a source of charge director solution; and

5 at least one charge director solution conduit that communicates between the source of charge director solution and the at least one carrier liquid conduit, wherein a quantity of charge director solution is sent to the reservoir responsive to a low conductivity measurement.

20. A printer system comprising:

10 at least one liquid toner reservoir, each said reservoir including a first detector that provides a first signal when the amount of liquid toner therein falls below a given volume and a second detector that measures the conductivity of the liquid toner and produces a second signal responsive thereto;

a source of carrier liquid;

15 a source of charge director solution;

at least one controller;

at least one carrier liquid conduit that communicates between the source of carrier liquid and the at least one liquid toner reservoir;

20 at least one charge director solution conduit that communicates between the source of charge director solution and the at least one carrier liquid conduit,

wherein the controller is operative to transfer a first quantity of carrier liquid to a liquid toner reservoir via the charge director conduit when the first signal associated with the reservoir indicates a low volume condition for the reservoir and is operative to send a second quantity of charge director solution to the reservoir via the charge-director and carrier-liquid
25 conduits, responsive to the second signal associated with the reservoir indicating a low conductivity condition.

21. A system according to claim 19 or claim 20 wherein, in transferring the charge director to the reservoir, the controller is operative to transfer the quantity of charge director
30 solution to the local carrier conduit from which it is carried by a subsequent transfer of carrier liquid to the reservoir.

22. A system according to claim 21 wherein the controller is operative to send the charge director solution to the local carrier liquid conduit immediately prior to sending carrier liquid to the reservoir such that the carrier liquid carries the charge director into the reservoir.

5 23. A system according to any of claims 19-22 wherein the quantity of charge director solution sent to the liquid toner reservoir is substantially less than the quantity of carrier liquid sent to the reservoir.

24. A system according to claim 23 wherein the charge director conduit joins the carrier liquid conduit near an entrance to the reservoir from the carrier liquid conduit.

25. A multi-printer system comprising:

a plurality of imaging apparatus, each said apparatus comprising:

a printing engine

15 a liquid-toner inlet line from which fresh liquid toner is fed to the printing engine;

a central source of liquid toner;

a liquid-toner feed which connects the central source to the liquid-toner inlet line;

20 at least one controller which transfers fresh liquid toner from the central source, via said feed.

26. A system according to claim 25 wherein each imaging apparatus includes:

a liquid-toner exhaust line which collects discharged liquid toner from the printing engine and delivers it to the central source.

25

27. A system according to claim 26 wherein the liquid-toner feed is a branching feed line comprising:

a junction;

a first feed line connecting the central source with the junction; and

30 a plurality of second feed lines connecting the junction with respective liquid-toner inlet lines of the imaging apparatus.

28. A system according to claim 27 wherein:

each of said plurality of feed lines includes a valve controlled by the at least one controller.

29. A system according to any of claims 25-28 wherein:

- 5 the imaging apparatus are multi-colored; and
a liquid-toner inlet line comprises a plurality of liquid-toner inlet lines.

30. A system according to any of claims 25-29 wherein the central source of liquid toner is multi-colored, comprising a plurality of central containers of liquid toner of different
10 colors.

31. A system according to claim 30 wherein the plurality of liquid-toner containers comprises liquid-toner containers of at least yellow, magenta and cyan toner.

15 32. A system according to any of claims 25-31 and including:

- a central source of carrier liquid; and
a carrier liquid conduit that connects the central source to the individual imaging apparatus,

wherein the at least one controller is operative to transfer carrier liquid from the
20 central source of carrier liquid to the individual imaging apparatus as required by the apparatus for cleaning.

33. A system according to claim 32 and including a carrier-liquid pump that pumps carrier-liquid to respective imaging apparatus responsive to commands from said at least one
25 controller.

34. A system according to claim 32 or claim 33 and including a carrier liquid return conduit that collects carrier liquid after use by the imaging device and transfers it to the central source of carrier liquid.

30 35. A system according to claim 34 and including a separator that removes toner particles from the collected carrier liquid prior to its delivery to the central source of carrier liquid.

36. A multi-printer system comprising:

a plurality of imaging apparatus,
a central source of carrier liquid;
at least one controller;

5 a central carrier-liquid conduit which connects the central source of carrier liquid to each of the imaging apparatus and carries carrier liquid to the individual apparatus responsive to a command from the at least one controller.

37. A system according to claim 36 and including a carrier-liquid exhaust line which collects discharged carrier liquid from the imaging apparatus and returns it to the central
10 source of carrier liquid.

38. A system according to any of the preceding claims wherein the imaging apparatus comprise electrostatographic imaging apparatus.

15 39. A system according to any of the preceding claims wherein the imaging apparatus comprise electrophotographic apparatus.

40. A system according to any of the preceding claims wherein the imaging apparatus comprise printers.

20

41. A system according to any of the preceding claims wherein the imaging apparatus comprise copiers.

25 42. A method of dispensing toner concentrate in a multi-printer facility comprising a plurality of imaging apparatus, each said apparatus comprising a liquid toner reservoir, the method comprising:

providing a central source of toner concentrate; and

automatically transferring toner concentrate from said central source to individual imaging apparatus.

30

43. A method according to claim 42 wherein transferring comprises transferring toner concentrate directly to a liquid-toner reservoir of the individual imaging apparatus, in response to a deficiency of toner concentrate in the reservoir.

44. A method according to claim 42 wherein transferring comprises transferring toner concentrate to a liquid-toner concentrate dispenser associated with a liquid-toner reservoir in the individual imaging apparatus.

5 45. A method of providing liquid toner in a multi-printer facility comprising a plurality of imaging apparatus, comprising:

providing a central source of liquid toner; and

automatically transferring liquid toner from said central source to individual imaging apparatus in response to a need of liquid toner in said imaging apparatus.

10

46. A method of providing carrier liquid in a multi-printer facility comprising a plurality of imaging apparatus, comprising:

providing a central source of carrier liquid; and

15 automatically transferring carrier liquid from said central source to individual imaging apparatus in response to a need of carrier liquid in said imaging apparatus.

PATENT COOPERATION TREATY

PCT

INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION REPORT

(PCT Article 36 and Rule 70)

Applicant's or agent's file reference PDV	FOR FURTHER ACTION		See Notification of Transmittal of International Preliminary Examination Report (Form PCT/IPEA/416)
International application No. PCT/IL99/00394	International filing date (<i>day/month/year</i>) 18/07/1999	Priority date (<i>day/month/year</i>) 18/07/1999	
International Patent Classification (IPC) or national classification and IPC G03G15/10			
Applicant INDIGO N.V. et al.			

1. This international preliminary examination report has been prepared by this International Preliminary Examining Authority and is transmitted to the applicant according to Article 36.



2. This REPORT consists of a total of 5 sheets, including this cover sheet.

- ☒ This report is also accompanied by ANNEXES, i.e. sheets of the description, claims and/or drawings which have been amended and are the basis for this report and/or sheets containing rectifications made before this Authority (see Rule 70.16 and Section 607 of the Administrative Instructions under the PCT).

These annexes consist of a total of seven sheets.

3. This report contains indications relating to the following items:

- I ☒ Basis of the report
- II ☐ Priority
- III ☐ Non-establishment of opinion with regard to novelty, inventive step and industrial applicability
- IV ☒ Lack of unity of invention
- V ☒ Reasoned statement under Article 35(2) with regard to novelty, inventive step or industrial applicability; citations and explanations supporting such statement
- VI ☐ Certain documents cited
- VII ☒ Certain defects in the international application
- VIII ☒ Certain observations on the international application

Date of submission of the demand 12/04/2000	Date of completion of this report 04.07.01
Name and mailing address of the international preliminary examining authority:  European Patent Office D-80298 Munich Tel. +49 89 2399 - 0 Tx: 523656 epmu d Fax: +49 89 2399 - 4465	Authorized officer Hiltner, K Telephone No. +49 89 2399 2198 

INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION REPORT

International application No. PCT/IL99/00394

I. Basis of the report

1. With regard to the **elements** of the international application (*Replacement sheets which have been furnished to the receiving Office in response to an invitation under Article 14 are referred to in this report as "originally filed" and are not annexed to this report since they do not contain amendments (Rules 70.16 and 70.17)*):

Description, pages:

1-20 as originally filed

Claims, pages:

21 as originally filed

22-24,26-28 as received on 17/01/2001 with letter of 16/01/2001

25 as received on 04/06/2001 with letter of 04/06/2001

Drawings, sheets:

1/12-12/12 as originally filed

2. With regard to the **language**, all the elements marked above were available or furnished to this Authority in the language in which the international application was filed, unless otherwise indicated under this item.

These elements were available or furnished to this Authority in the following language: , which is:

- ☐ the language of a translation furnished for the purposes of the international search (under Rule 23.1(b)).
- ☐ the language of publication of the international application (under Rule 48.3(b)).
- ☐ the language of a translation furnished for the purposes of international preliminary examination (under Rule 55.2 and/or 55.3).

3. With regard to any **nucleotide and/or amino acid sequence** disclosed in the international application, the international preliminary examination was carried out on the basis of the sequence listing:

- ☐ contained in the international application in written form.
- ☐ filed together with the international application in computer readable form.
- ☐ furnished subsequently to this Authority in written form.
- ☐ furnished subsequently to this Authority in computer readable form.
- ☐ The statement that the subsequently furnished written sequence listing does not go beyond the disclosure in the international application as filed has been furnished.
- ☐ The statement that the information recorded in computer readable form is identical to the written sequence listing has been furnished.

**INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY
EXAMINATION REPORT**

International application No. PCT/IL99/00394

4. The amendments have resulted in the cancellation of:

- ☐ the description, pages:
- ☐ the claims, Nos.:
- ☐ the drawings, sheets:

5. ☐ This report has been established as if (some of) the amendments had not been made, since they have been considered to go beyond the disclosure as filed (Rule 70.2(c)):

(Any replacement sheet containing such amendments must be referred to under item 1 and annexed to this report.)

6. Additional observations, if necessary:

IV. Lack of unity of invention

1. In response to the invitation to restrict or pay additional fees the applicant has:

- ☒ restricted the claims.
- ☐ paid additional fees.
- ☐ paid additional fees under protest.
- ☐ neither restricted nor paid additional fees.

2. ☐ This Authority found that the requirement of unity of invention is not complied and chose, according to Rule 68.1, not to invite the applicant to restrict or pay additional fees.

3. This Authority considers that the requirement of unity of invention in accordance with Rules 13.1, 13.2 and 13.3 is

- ☐ complied with.
- ☒ not complied with for the following reasons:
see separate sheet

4. Consequently, the following parts of the international application were the subject of international preliminary examination in establishing this report:

- ☐ all parts.
- ☒ the parts relating to claims Nos. 1-21,23-46.

V. Reasoned statement under Article 35(2) with regard to novelty, inventive step or industrial applicability; citations and explanations supporting such statement

1. Statement

INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION REPORT

International application No. PCT/IL99/00394

Novelty (N)	Yes:	Claims	1-21,23-46
	No:	Claims	
Inventive step (IS)	Yes:	Claims	1-21,23-46
	No:	Claims	
Industrial applicability (IA)	Yes:	Claims	1-21,23-46
	No:	Claims	

2. Citations and explanations
see separate sheet

VII. Certain defects in the international application

The following defects in the form or contents of the international application have been noted:
see separate sheet

VIII. Certain observations on the international application

The following observations on the clarity of the claims, description, and drawings or on the question whether the claims are fully supported by the description, are made:
see separate sheet

**INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY
EXAMINATION REPORT - SEPARATE SHEET**

International application No. PCT/IL99/00394

re item IV (Lack of unity...):--

1. Claim 22 comprises, in a first alternative, a single liquid toner reservoir.
If the single general concept is a central liquid source for supplying liquid to a plurality of imaging apparatus, the system of claim 22 in this first alternative is excluded. A central source of liquid only makes sense if liquid is to be supplied to a plurality of imaging apparatus.
2. The request for examination, dated 16.01.01 and 04.06.01, is not clear.
On 16.01.01, the applicant filed amended claim pages 22-28 and on 04.06.01, an amended claim page 25.
 - 2.1 However, there is no amendment found on claim page 22, compared to the original claim page.
 - 2.2 Although claim 22 should not be examined, the applicant maintained claims dependent thereto. He did not correct the dependancies of claims 23-26,38-41.

re item V (Reasoned statement....):--

Independent are claims 1,13,27 (multi-printer system) and 42,45,46 (method).
All four documents cited in the ISR relate to a single liquid toner printer.
Therefore they can not render obvious the main feature of said six claims, i.e. a central source for liquid supply. Art. 33(3) PCT is not infringed.
The dependent claims, perforce, meet the requirements of Art. 33 PCT.

re item VII (Certain defects...):--

Non-conformity with Rule 15.1 (a) (iii) PCT:

1. Page 5, lines 19-27 refers to the original version of claim 13 and does not conform with the amended version.
2. Page 8, lines 13-20 refers to the original claim 36 now deleted.

re item VIII (Certain observations...):--

Claim 23 contains the expression "local carrier liquid conduit" and is appended to claim 21 this being appended to claim 13 via claim 15. However claim 13 does not provide an antecedent for this expression.

PATENT COOPERATION TREATY

RECEIVED

12 -07- 2001

FENSTER & Co.

PCT

From the
INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY EXAMINING AUTHORITY

To:

FENSTER, Paul
FENSTER & COMPANY PATENT
ATTORNEYS, LTD
P.O.Box 10256
Petach Tikva 49002
ISRAEL

NOTIFICATION OF TRANSMITTAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION REPORT

(PCT Rule 71.1)

Date of mailing
(day/month/year)

04. 07. 01

Applicant's or agent's file reference
PDV

IMPORTANT NOTIFICATION

International application No.
PCT/IL99/00394

International filing date (day/month/year)
18/07/1999

Priority date (day/month/year)
18/07/1999

Applicant
INDIGO N.V. et al.

1. The applicant is hereby notified that this International Preliminary Examining Authority transmits herewith the international preliminary examination report and its annexes, if any, established on the international application.
2. A copy of the report and its annexes, if any, is being transmitted to the International Bureau for communication to all the elected Offices.
3. Where required by any of the elected Offices, the International Bureau will prepare an English translation of the report (but not of any annexes) and will transmit such translation to those Offices.

4. REMINDER

The applicant must enter the national phase before each elected Office by performing certain acts (filing translations and paying national fees) within 30 months from the priority date (or later in some Offices) (Article 39(1)) (see also the reminder sent by the International Bureau with Form PCT/IB/301).

Where a translation of the international application must be furnished to an elected Office, that translation must contain a translation of any annexes to the international preliminary examination report. It is the applicant's responsibility to prepare and furnish such translation directly to each elected Office concerned.

For further details on the applicable time limits and requirements of the elected Offices, see Volume II of the PCT Applicant's Guide.

Name and mailing address of the IPEA/

 European Patent Office
D-80298 Munich
Tel. +49 89 2399 - 0 Tx: 523656 epmu d
Fax: +49 89 2399 - 4465

Authorized officer

Garvey, R

Tel. +49 89 2399-2271



PATENT COOPERATION TREATY

From the INTERNATIONAL SEARCHING AUTHORITY

PCT

NOTIFICATION OF TRANSMITTAL OF
THE INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT
OR THE DECLARATION

(PCT Rule 44.1)

To:

**FENSTER & COMPANY PATENT
ATTORNEYS, LTD**
Attn. FENSTER, Paul
P.O.Box 10256
Petach Tikva 49002
ISRAEL

Date of mailing
(day/month/year)

16/03/2000

Applicant's or agent's file reference

PDV

FOR FURTHER ACTION

See paragraphs 1 and 4 below

International application No.

PCT/IL 99/ 00394

International filing date

(day/month/year)

18/07/1999

Applicant

INDIGO N.V. et al.

1. ☒ The applicant is hereby notified that the International Search Report has been established and is transmitted herewith.

Filing of amendments and statement under Article 19:

The applicant is entitled, if he so wishes, to amend the claims of the International Application (see Rule 46):

When? The time limit for filing such amendments is normally 2 months from the date of transmittal of the International Search Report; however, for more details, see the notes on the accompanying sheet.

Where? Directly to the International Bureau of WIPO
34, chemin des Colombettes
1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland
Facsimile No.: (41-22) 740.14.35

For more detailed instructions, see the notes on the accompanying sheet.

2. ☐ The applicant is hereby notified that no International Search Report will be established and that the declaration under Article 17(2)(a) to that effect is transmitted herewith.

3. ☐ With regard to the protest against payment of (an) additional fee(s) under Rule 40.2, the applicant is notified that

☐ the protest together with the decision thereon has been transmitted to the International Bureau together with the applicant's request to forward the texts of both the protest and the decision thereon to the designated Offices.

☐ no decision has been made yet on the protest; the applicant will be notified as soon as a decision is made.

4. **Further action(s):** The applicant is reminded of the following:

Shortly after 18 months from the priority date, the International application will be published by the International Bureau. If the applicant wishes to avoid or postpone publication, a notice of withdrawal of the International application, or of the priority claim, must reach the International Bureau as provided in Rules 90bis.1 and 90bis.3, respectively, before the completion of the technical preparations for International publication.

Within 19 months from the priority date, a demand for International preliminary examination must be filed if the applicant wishes to postpone the entry into the national phase until 30 months from the priority date (in some Offices even later).

Within 20 months from the priority date, the applicant must perform the prescribed acts for entry into the national phase before all designated Offices which have not been elected in the demand or in a later election within 19 months from the priority date or could not be elected because they are not bound by Chapter II.

Name and mailing address of the International Searching Authority



European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2
NL-2280 HV Rijswijk
Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Tx. 31 651 epo nl
Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016

Authorized officer

Carl Hakim

These Notes are intended to give the basic instructions concerning the filing of amendments under article 19. The Notes are based on the requirements of the Patent Cooperation Treaty, the Regulations and the Administrative Instructions under that Treaty. In case of discrepancy between these Notes and those requirements, the latter are applicable. For more detailed information, see also the PCT Applicant's Guide, a publication of WIPO.

In these Notes, "Article", "Rule", and "Section" refer to the provisions of the PCT, the PCT Regulations and the PCT Administrative Instructions respectively.

INSTRUCTIONS CONCERNING AMENDMENTS UNDER ARTICLE 19

The applicant has, after having received the international search report, one opportunity to amend the claims of the international application. It should however be emphasized that, since all parts of the international application (claims, description and drawings) may be amended during the international preliminary examination procedure, there is usually no need to file amendments of the claims under Article 19 except where, e.g. the applicant wants the latter to be published for the purposes of provisional protection or has another reason for amending the claims before international publication. Furthermore, it should be emphasized that provisional protection is available in some States only.

What parts of the international application may be amended?

Under Article 19, only the claims may be amended.

During the international phase, the claims may also be amended (or further amended) under Article 34 before the International Preliminary Examining Authority. The description and drawings may only be amended under Article 34 before the International Examining Authority.

Upon entry into the national phase, all parts of the international application may be amended under Article 28 or, where applicable, Article 41.

When?

Within 2 months from the date of transmittal of the international search report or 16 months from the priority date, whichever time limit expires later. It should be noted, however, that the amendments will be considered as having been received on time if they are received by the International Bureau after the expiration of the applicable time limit but before the completion of the technical preparations for international publication (Rule 46.1).

Where not to file the amendments?

The amendments may only be filed with the International Bureau and not with the receiving Office or the International Searching Authority (Rule 46.2).

Where a demand for international preliminary examination has been/is filed, see below.

How?

Either by cancelling one or more entire claims, by adding one or more new claims or by amending the text of one or more of the claims as filed.

A replacement sheet must be submitted for each sheet of the claims which, on account of an amendment or amendments, differs from the sheet originally filed.

All the claims appearing on a replacement sheet must be numbered in Arabic numerals. Where a claim is cancelled, no renumbering of the other claims is required. In all cases where claims are renumbered, they must be renumbered consecutively (Administrative Instructions, Section 205(b)).

The amendments must be made in the language in which the international application is to be published.

What documents must/may accompany the amendments?

Letter (Section 205(b)):

The amendments must be submitted with a letter.

The letter will not be published with the international application and the amended claims. It should not be confused with the "Statement under Article 19(1)" (see below, under "Statement under Article 19(1)").

The letter must be in English or French, at the choice of the applicant. However, if the language of the international application is English, the letter must be in English; if the language of the international application is French, the letter must be in French.

The letter must indicate the differences between the claims as filed and the claims as amended. It must, in particular, indicate, in connection with each claim appearing in the international application (it being understood that identical indications concerning several claims may be grouped), whether

- (i) the claim is unchanged;
- (ii) the claim is cancelled;
- (iii) the claim is new;
- (iv) the claim replaces one or more claims as filed;
- (v) the claim is the result of the division of a claim as filed.

The following examples illustrate the manner in which amendments must be explained in the accompanying letter:

1. [Where originally there were 48 claims and after amendment of some claims there are 51]:
"Claims 1 to 29, 31, 32, 34, 35, 37 to 48 replaced by amended claims bearing the same numbers; claims 30, 33 and 36 unchanged; new claims 49 to 51 added."
2. [Where originally there were 15 claims and after amendment of all claims there are 11]:
"Claims 1 to 15 replaced by amended claims 1 to 11."
3. [Where originally there were 14 claims and the amendments consist in cancelling some claims and in adding new claims]:
"Claims 1 to 6 and 14 unchanged; claims 7 to 13 cancelled; new claims 15, 16 and 17 added." or
"Claims 7 to 13 cancelled; new claims 15, 16 and 17 added; all other claims unchanged."
4. [Where various kinds of amendments are made]:
"Claims 1-10 unchanged; claims 11 to 13, 18 and 19 cancelled; claims 14, 15 and 16 replaced by amended claim 14; claim 17 subdivided into amended claims 15, 16 and 17; new claims 20 and 21 added."

"Statement under article 19(1)" (Rule 46.4)

The amendments may be accompanied by a statement explaining the amendments and indicating any impact that such amendments might have on the description and the drawings (which cannot be amended under Article 19(1)).

The statement will be published with the international application and the amended claims.

It must be in the language in which the international application is to be published.

It must be brief, not exceeding 500 words if in English or if translated into English.

It should not be confused with and does not replace the letter indicating the differences between the claims as filed and as amended. It must be filed on a separate sheet and must be identified as such by a heading, preferably by using the words "Statement under Article 19(1)."

It may not contain any disparaging comments on the international search report or the relevance of citations contained in that report. Reference to citations, relevant to a given claim, contained in the international search report may be made only in connection with an amendment of that claim.

Consequence if a demand for international preliminary examination has already been filed

If, at the time of filing any amendments under Article 19, a demand for international preliminary examination has already been submitted, the applicant must preferably, at the same time of filing the amendments with the International Bureau, also file a copy of such amendments with the International Preliminary Examining Authority (see Rule 62.2(a), first sentence).

Consequence with regard to translation of the international application for entry into the national phase

The applicant's attention is drawn to the fact that, where upon entry into the national phase, a translation of the claims as amended under Article 19 may have to be furnished to the designated/elected Offices, instead of, or in addition to, the translation of the claims as filed.

For further details on the requirements of each designated/elected Office, see Volume II of the PCT Applicant's Guide.

PATENT COOPERATION TREATY

PCT

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

(PCT Article 18 and Rules 43 and 44)

Applicant's or agent's file reference PDV	FOR FURTHER ACTION see Notification of Transmittal of International Search Report (Form PCT/ISA/220) as well as, where applicable, item 5 below.	
International application No. PCT/IL 99/ 00394	International filing date (day/month/year) 18/07/1999	(Earliest) Priority Date (day/month/year)
Applicant INDIGO N.V. et al.		

This International Search Report has been prepared by this International Searching Authority and is transmitted to the applicant according to Article 18. A copy is being transmitted to the International Bureau.

This International Search Report consists of a total of 3 sheets.

☒ It is also accompanied by a copy of each prior art document cited in this report.

1. Basis of the report

- a. With regard to the language, the international search was carried out on the basis of the international application in the language in which it was filed, unless otherwise indicated under this item.

☐ the international search was carried out on the basis of a translation of the international application furnished to this Authority (Rule 23.1(b)).

- b. With regard to any nucleotide and/or amino acid sequence disclosed in the international application, the international search was carried out on the basis of the sequence listing:

☐ contained in the international application in written form.

☐ filed together with the international application in computer readable form.

☐ furnished subsequently to this Authority in written form.

☐ furnished subsequently to this Authority in computer readable form.

☐ the statement that the subsequently furnished written sequence listing does not go beyond the disclosure in the international application as filed has been furnished.

☐ the statement that the information recorded in computer readable form is identical to the written sequence listing has been furnished

2. ☐ Certain claims were found unsearchable (See Box I).

3. ☐ Unity of invention is lacking (see Box II).

4. With regard to the title,

☒ the text is approved as submitted by the applicant.

☐ the text has been established by this Authority to read as follows:

5. With regard to the abstract,

☒ the text is approved as submitted by the applicant.

☐ the text has been established, according to Rule 38.2(b), by this Authority as it appears in Box III. The applicant may, within one month from the date of mailing of this international search report, submit comments to this Authority.

6. The figure of the drawings to be published with the abstract is Figure No.

☒ as suggested by the applicant.

☐ because the applicant failed to suggest a figure.

☐ because this figure better characterizes the invention.

1b

☐ None of the figures.

PATENT COOPERATION TREATY

PCT

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

(PCT Article 18 and Rules 43 and 44)

Applicant's or agent's file reference PDV	FOR FURTHER ACTION see Notification of Transmittal of International Search Report (Form PCT/ISA/220) as well as, where applicable, item 5 below.	
International application No. PCT/IL 99/ 00394	International filing date (day/month/year) 18/07/1999	(Earliest) Priority Date (day/month/year)
Applicant INDIGO N.V. et al.		

This International Search Report has been prepared by this International Searching Authority and is transmitted to the applicant according to Article 18. A copy is being transmitted to the International Bureau.

This International Search Report consists of a total of 3 sheets.

☒ It is also accompanied by a copy of each prior art document cited in this report.

1. Basis of the report

- a. With regard to the **language**, the international search was carried out on the basis of the international application in the language in which it was filed, unless otherwise indicated under this item.

☐ the international search was carried out on the basis of a translation of the international application furnished to this Authority (Rule 23.1(b)).

- b. With regard to any **nucleotide and/or amino acid sequence** disclosed in the international application, the international search was carried out on the basis of the sequence listing :

☐ contained in the international application in written form.

☐ filed together with the international application in computer readable form.

☐ furnished subsequently to this Authority in written form.

☐ furnished subsequently to this Authority in computer readable form.

☐ the statement that the subsequently furnished written sequence listing does not go beyond the disclosure in the international application as filed has been furnished.

☐ the statement that the information recorded in computer readable form is identical to the written sequence listing has been furnished

2. ☐ **Certain claims were found unsearchable** (See Box I).

3. ☐ **Unity of invention is lacking** (see Box II).

4. With regard to the **title**,

☒ the text is approved as submitted by the applicant.

☐ the text has been established by this Authority to read as follows:

5. With regard to the **abstract**,

☒ the text is approved as submitted by the applicant.

☐ the text has been established, according to Rule 38.2(b), by this Authority as it appears in Box III. The applicant may, within one month from the date of mailing of this international search report, submit comments to this Authority.

6. The figure of the **drawings** to be published with the abstract is Figure No.

☒ as suggested by the applicant.

☐ because the applicant failed to suggest a figure.

☐ because this figure better characterizes the invention.

1b

☐ None of the figures.

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No

PCT/99/00394

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
 IPC 7 G03G15/10 G03G15/01

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC 7 G03G B65D

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 5 231 454 A (LANDA BENZION) 27 July 1993 (1993-07-27) abstract; claims; figure 15 ---	1-19, 25-46
A	US 4 860 924 A (SIMMS ROBERT M ET AL) 29 August 1989 (1989-08-29) cited in the application abstract; claims; figure 1 ---	20-24
A	US 5 442 427 A (DAY GENE F) 15 August 1995 (1995-08-15) abstract; claims; figure 2 ---	1, 13, 25, 42, 45, 46
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☒ Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.

☒ Patent family members are listed in annex.

* Special categories of cited documents :

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

"E" earlier document but published on or after the international filing date

"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)

"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art.

"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

9 March 2000

Date of mailing of the international search report

16/03/2000

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No

PCT/99/00394

C.(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED RELEVANT

Category °	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	<p>PATENT ABSTRACTS OF JAPAN vol. 1998, no. 11, 30 September 1998 (1998-09-30) & JP 10 166618 A (CANON INC), 23 June 1998 (1998-06-23) abstract</p> <p>-----</p>	<p>1, 13, 25, 42, 45, 46</p>

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International Application No

PCT/99/00394

Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
US 5231454 A	27-07-1993	US 5557376 A	17-09-1996
		US 5585900 A	17-12-1996
		CA 2056993 A	16-11-1990
		DE 69003099 D	07-10-1993
		DE 69003099 T	17-03-1994
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		DE 69016652 T	31-08-1995
		EP 0472629 A	04-03-1992
		EP 0468604 A	29-01-1992
		HK 154295 A	06-10-1995
		JP 2988722 B	13-12-1999
		JP 4505222 T	10-09-1992
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		US 5749032 A	05-05-1998
US 4860924 A	29-08-1989	AT 100606 T	15-02-1994
		AU 7083687 A	09-09-1987
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US 5442427 A	15-08-1995	WO 9510074 A	13-04-1995
JP 10166618 A	23-06-1998	NONE	

EUROPEAN PATENT OFFICE

Patent Abstracts of Japan

PUBLICATION NUMBER : 10166618
PUBLICATION DATE : 23-06-98

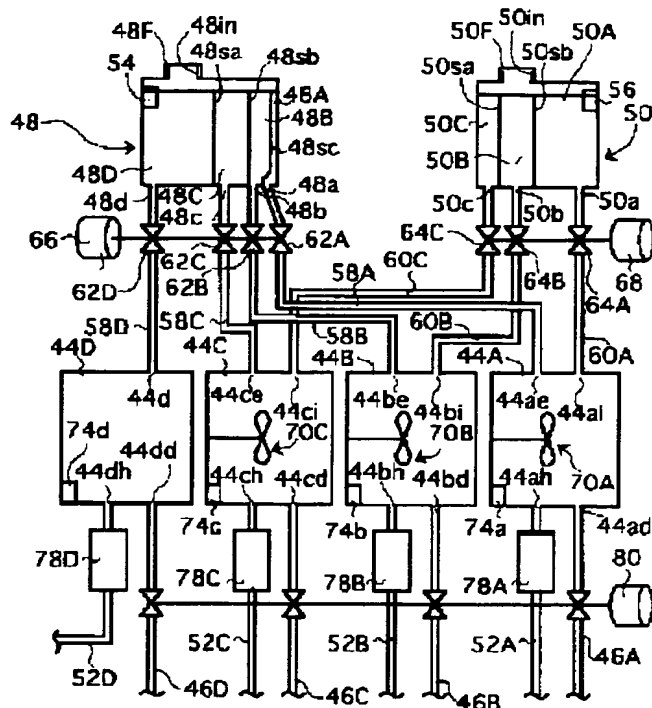
APPLICATION DATE : 12-12-96
APPLICATION NUMBER : 08332238

APPLICANT : CANON INC;

INVENTOR : MORI AKIHIRO;

INT.CL. : B41J 2/175 B41J 2/205

TITLE : INK JET RECORDER



ABSTRACT : PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED: To eliminate the work for replacing each ink cartridge while avoiding erroneous ink supply work.

SOLUTION: The ink jet recorder comprises a stock ink solution tank 48 having chambers 48A-48D each storing specified quantity of stock ink solution, and a diluting liquid tank 50 having chambers 50A-50C each storing specified quantity of diluting liquid. When the quantity of ink in at least one of ink tanks 44A-44D is lower than a specified value, a control unit 88 supplies each ink tank 44A-44D with respective stock ink solutions from the stock ink solution tank 48 and respective diluting liquids from the diluting liquid tank 50 through communication paths 58A-58D and 60A-60C after respective inks are discharged.

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